

PLAYBOY

ENTERTAINMENT FOR ALL

JULY/AUGUST 2018

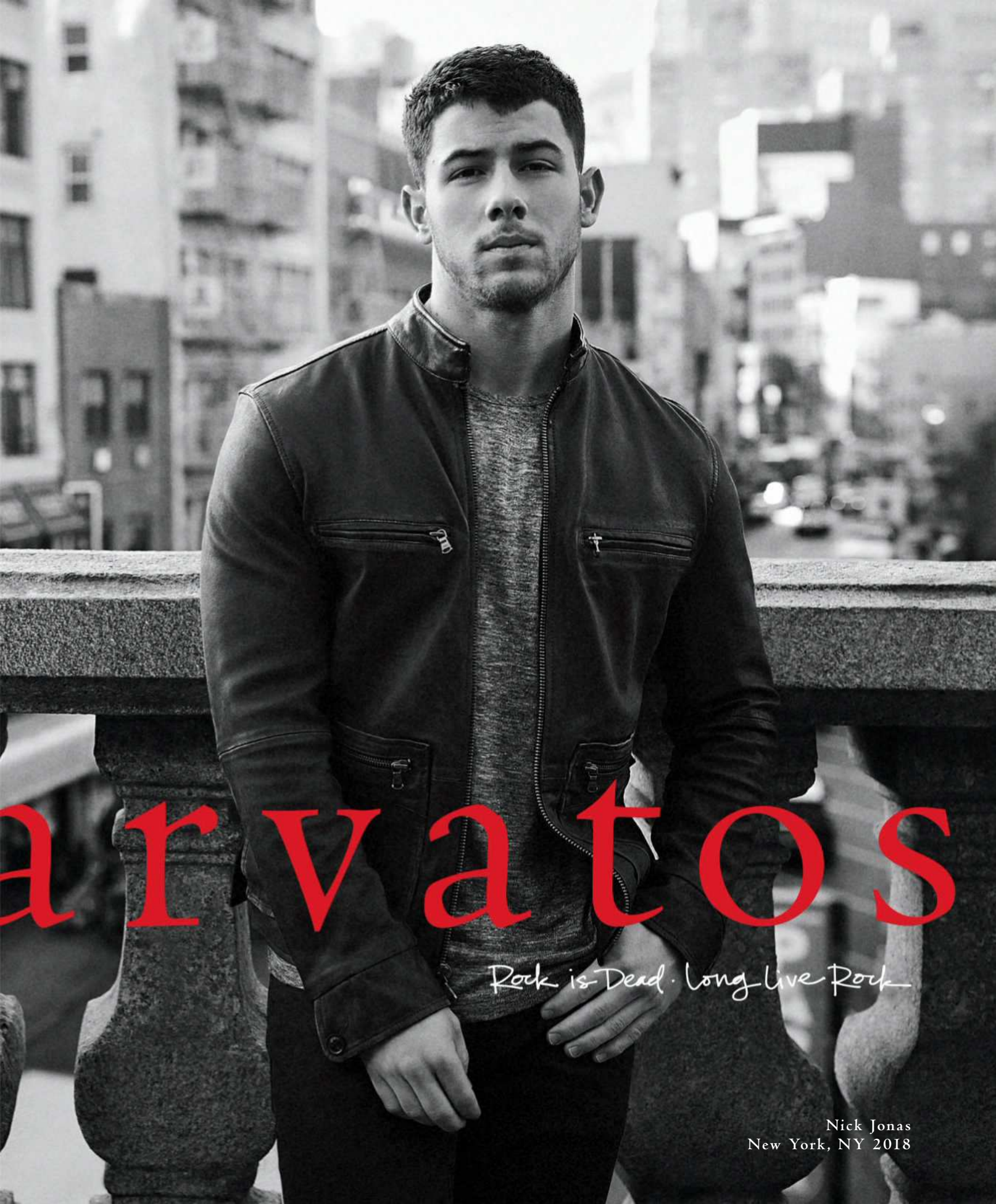
SUMMER COMEDY

THE INTERVIEW: KATHY GRIFFIN • HANNIBAL BURESS • PAUL F. TOMPKINS
• CHAPO TRAP HOUSE • NICOLE BYER • JIMMY O. YANG • HEF'S FIRST ROAST & MORE

20Q: LAKEITH STANFIELD • PROFILE: JORDAN PETERSON • RALPH NADER SAVES AMERICA • NEW FICTION
BY WALTER MOSLEY • AN EX-MINISTER AMONG THE ATHEISTS • WOMEN WITH GUNS • A POLYAMORY PRIMER



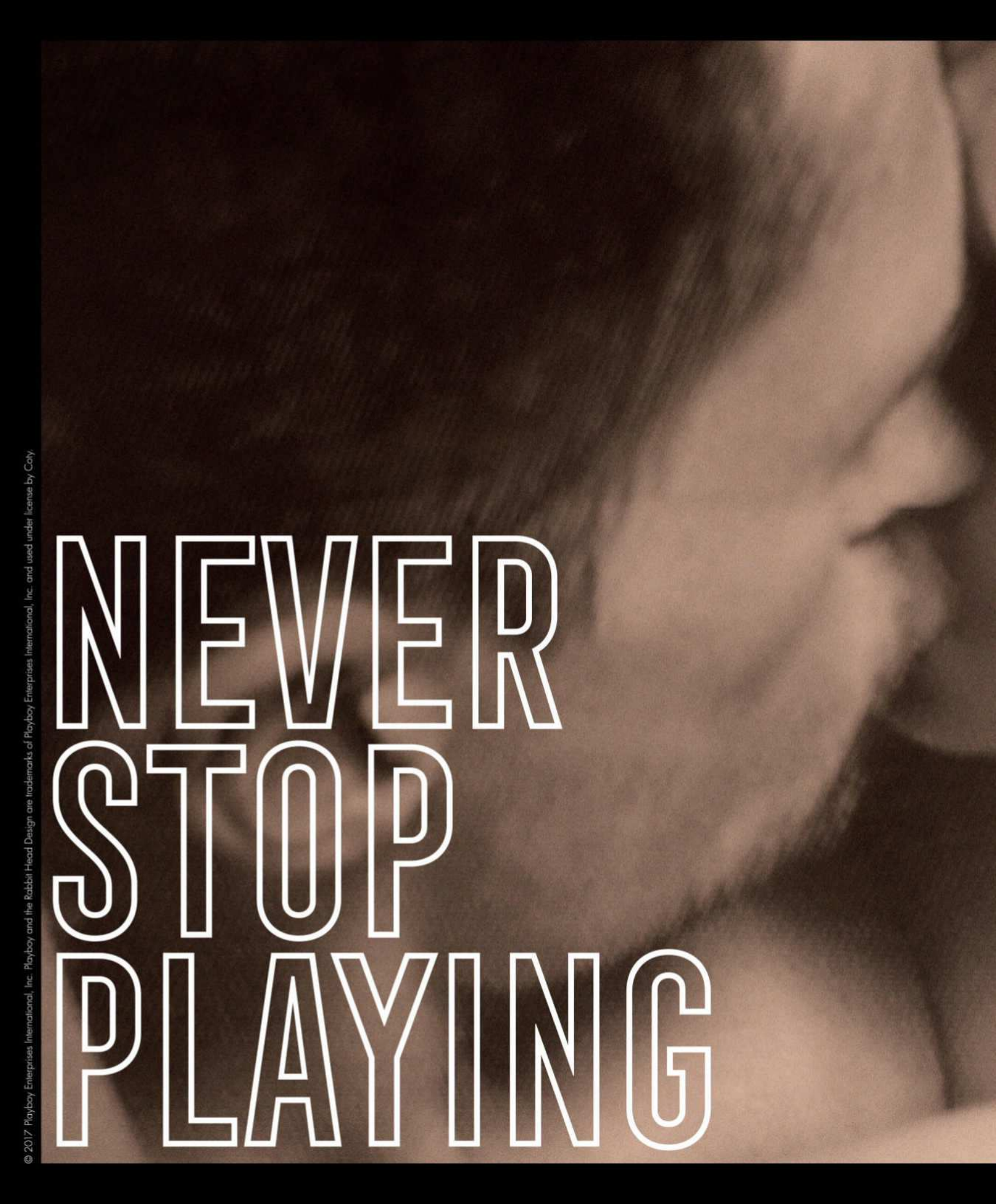
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Rock is Dead. Long Live Rock

Nick Jonas
New York, NY 2018



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PLAYBOY
FRAGRANCES FOR MEN & WOMEN



PLAYBILL

Simon Dumenco

Dumenco has written for *Esquire*, *New York* and *Rolling Stone* and interviewed Philip Seymour Hoffman, Scarlett Johansson and Lou Reed, but *Dr. Jordan Peterson Makes His Rounds* marks the first time the writer-editor has profiled a university professor (or a fire-breathing Canadian, for that matter).



Danielle Levitt

In addition to a passel of editorial credits, this photographer's portfolio is packed with standout campaigns for the likes of *Girls* and *Planned Parenthood*. In *20Q*, the shutterbug—and Emmy-winning director—zooms in on *Get Out* scene-stealer Lakeith Stanfield following the 26-year-old's star turn in *Sorry to Bother You*.



Rebecca Smeyne

Smeyne has turned her lens on Kendall Jenner and Priyanka Chopra for *The New York Times*, but her penchant for portraying strong women isn't confined to the red carpet. For *She Shoots*, Smeyne headed to Vermont to meet the gunslingers featured in Julia Cooke's investigation of America's growing population of women-run gun clubs.



Chris Shonting

Shonting's thoughtful yet in-your-face style is the 2018 photographic synthesis of *Kids* and "Kids in America." For *Laughter in the Dark*, part of *Playboy's Summer Comedy Spotlight*, the New York-based shooter spent time with the lovable leftist podcast pundits of *Chapo Trap House*.



Ana Dias

Frequent contributing photographer Dias has shot *PLAYBOY* covers and pictorials in virtually every corner of the globe. For this issue she sailed to the shores of her native Portugal for some fun in the sun with July Playmate Valeria Lakhina. Check out the Slavic beauty's sexy maritime-themed shoot in *Lifesaver*.

Walter Mosley

In *Showdown on the Hudson*, Mosley's take on the classic Western, black Texas cowboy Billy Consigas lands in Harlem, where he throws down for justice and, of course, a girl. The Grammy recipient and author of the hard-boiled Easy Rawlins series has a new stand-alone novel, *John Woman*, out in September from Atlantic Monthly Press.



Ralph Nader

The author of our *Politics* page needs little introduction. In *Calling All Super-Voters*, the consumer advocate and former presidential candidate reaffirms the importance of voter education and accountability in the lead-up to the midterms. Nader's latest book, *To the Ramparts*, is out August 7 from Seven Stories Press.



Ling Ma

In *Shark Fin Dinner Party*, Ma, who teaches fiction writing at the University of Chicago, navigates love and adulthood via protagonist Candace Chen's epic apartment fete in Brooklyn. The exclusive excerpt is from Ma's debut novel, *Severance*, out August 14 from Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

CREDITS: cover and pp. 50–58 model Sarah Stephens at Chic Management, photography by Cameron Hammond, produced by Rachel Gill. Photography by: p. 4 courtesy Ana Dias, courtesy Simon Dumenco, courtesy Danielle Levitt, courtesy Ralph Nader, courtesy Chris Shonting, courtesy Rebecca Smeyne, Julie Prisloe, Marcia Wilson; p. 16 Daria Nagovitz (5); p. 17 Jerritt Clark/Getty Images for Playboy (5), Larry French/Getty Images for Playboy (10); p. 18 courtesy Playboy Archives (8), Suzanne Seed; p. 22 Samuel Alemayhu, Ruby Law, Ina Stanimirova, Ungano + Agriodimas, Jacki Vitetta; p. 30 Jay L. Clendenin/Los Angeles Times/Contour by Getty Images; p. 33 Moviestore Collection Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo (3); p. 64 Lisa Whiteman; p. 65 Nicolas Maloof, Mindy Tucker; p. 66 Mindy Tucker (3); p. 69 Robyn Von Swank; p. 93 AP Photo/Evan Vucci; p. 94 Josiah Mannion/courtesy American Atheists (3); p. 95 Josiah Mannion/courtesy American Atheists; p. 138 Eduardo Lima/Metro News; p. 155 Ronald Grant Archive/Alamy Stock Photo; p. 156 courtesy Playboy Archives (2), Moviestore Collection Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo; p. 157 courtesy United Artists, courtesy Universal Pictures, courtesy Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures; pp. 159–172 courtesy Playboy Archives. Pp. 142–145 exclusive excerpt of *Severance* by Ling Ma (August 14, Farrar, Straus and Giroux). P. 25 styling by Kelley Ash, hair by Adrian Arredondo, makeup by Mynxii White for Photogenics Army; pp. 41–48 styling by Tara Nichols, hair by Johnny Stuntz for Crosby Carter Management, makeup by Mandy O'Hanlon, manicure by Emi Kudo for Opus Beauty; pp. 76–90 model Valeria Lakhina, hair and makeup by Jenny Miranda, produced by Goncalo Jorge; pp. 102–107 model Kayslee Collins, styling by Kelley Ash, hair and makeup by Janice Kinigopoulos; pp. 114–127 model Lorena Medina at No Ties Management, styling by Kelley Ash, hair and makeup by Tami Shirey for Atelier Management; pp. 130–135 styling by Adam Ballheim for the Wall Group, grooming by Janice Kinjo for Exclusive Artists Management, prop styling by Cooper Vasquez for the Magnet Agency, produced by Stephanie Porto; pp. 146–154 model Megan Moore at Frank Model Management, styling by Kelley Ash, hair and makeup by Bree Stanchfield.

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CONTENTS

Departments

- LET'S PLAY** Get into hot water with singer and model Caroline Vreeland **25**
- FOOD** Our six designed-to-impress recipes will boost your grill skills **26**
- SEX** Considering an open relationship? Our polyamory primer is your first step **28**
- TV** With *Yellowstone*, writer-director Taylor Sheridan breathes new life into the Western **30**
- MOVIES** He may have produced *Get Out* and the *Purge* saga, but Jason Blum prefers to be on the outside looking in **32**
- POLITICS** Ralph Nader, America's citizen watchdog nonpareil, takes on the midterms **36**
- ALSO:** Hotdogging with *Drawn Data*; the *Playboy Advisor* on handling hairy bods; Jimmy O. Yang jokes around; and more

Features

- INTERVIEW** Can't-keep-her-down comedian Kathy Griffin dishes on men, mistakes, #MeToo and more **41**
- PLAYBOY'S SUMMER COMEDY SPOTLIGHT 60**
Hannibal Buress's beautiful mind | The *Chapo Trap House* crew | Paul F. Tompkins, pod person
Julio Torres and the Brooklyn funnies | Emily Flake's six types of laughter
Your brain on comedy | Nicole Byer and the chuckle-fuckers | A saucy farmyard tale from Nicholas Gurewitch
- AMONG THE ATHEISTS** A former minister joins the growing ranks of American nonbelievers **92**
- FICTION** A young cowboy in the city seeks justice in Walter Mosley's *Showdown on the Hudson* **96**
- SHE SHOOTS** Armed with Second Amendment savvy and firearm expertise, these women are right at home on the range **108**
- 20Q** "Show the art and shut up," says the scary-talented Lakeith Stanfield **130**
- PROFILE** Canadian contrarian Jordan Peterson wants you to put on your re-thinking cap **136**
- FICTION** Love sparks on a fire escape in Ling Ma's *Shark Fin Dinner Party* **142**
- HERITAGE** Playboy goes to the movies. Plus: Hef is ribbed, for his pleasure; classic Playmates; vintage cartoons **155**

Pictorials

- SUN SONG** Enjoy A-side, B-side and poolside with Australian model Sarah Stephens **50**
- LIFESAVER** July Playmate Valeria Lakhina is ready to rescue you **76**
- BASIC INSTINCT** Sultry, cinematic Kayslee Collins brings neo-noir to life **102**
- HI, PRIESTESS** Come along on a spiritual journey as we worship heavenly August Playmate Lorena Medina **114**
- MANE STAY** A skate date with Megan Moore proves that blondes really do have Moore fun **146**

ON THE COVER Sarah Stephens, photographed by Cameron Hammond. **Opposite:** Valeria Lakhina, photographed by Ana Dias.



PLAYBOY

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1953-2017

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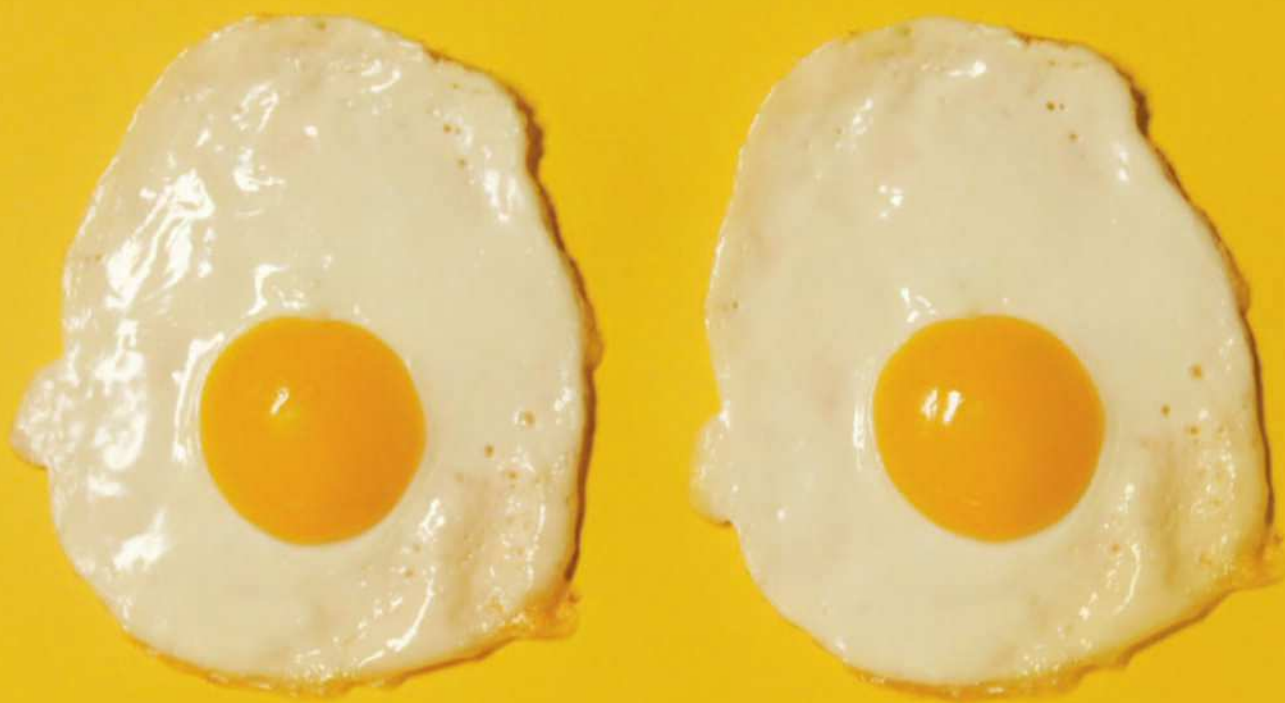
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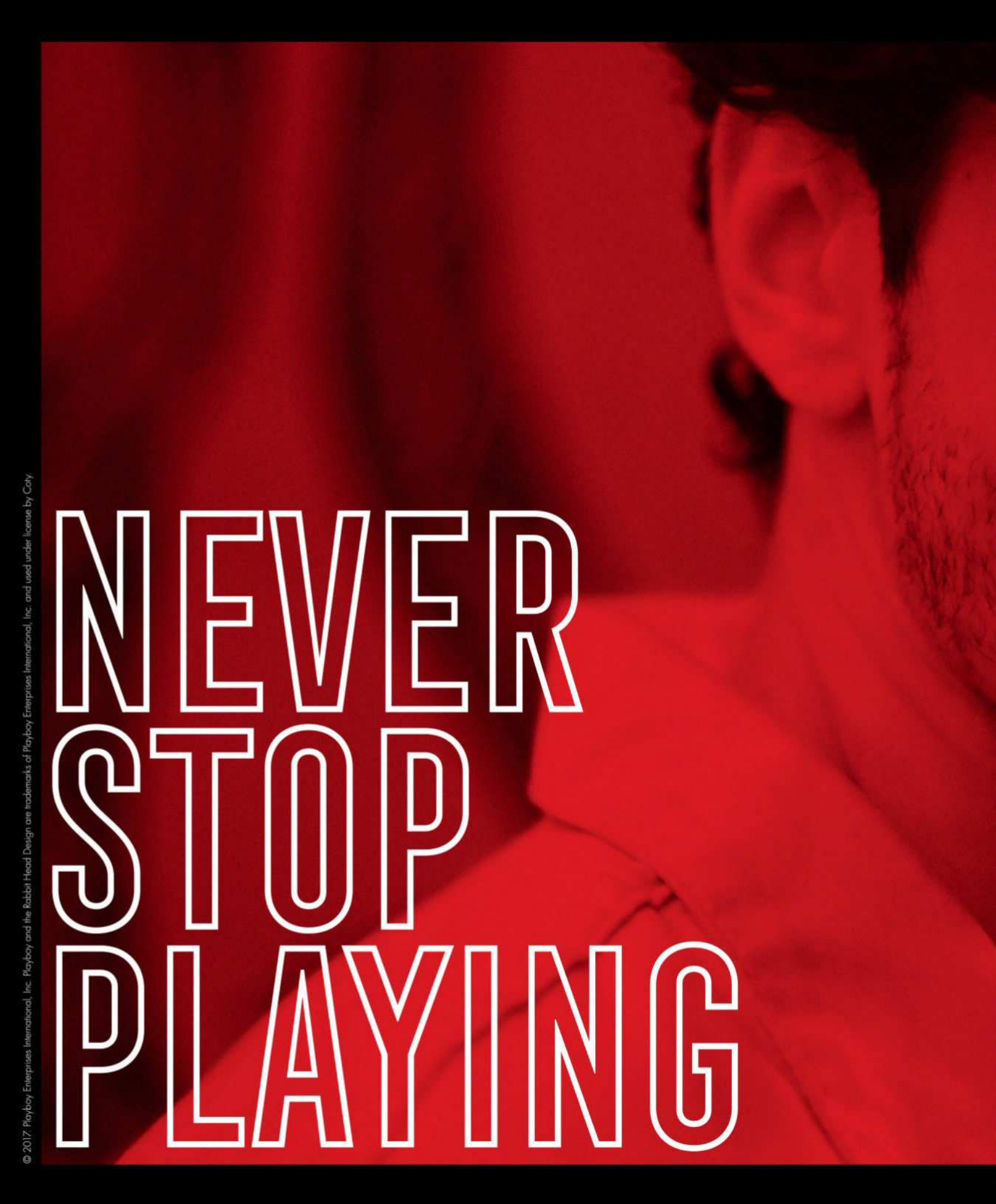
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DEAR PLAYBOY

THE PLEASURE IS OURS

You knocked it out of the park with your May/June issue. How fun and incredibly sexy to see the Femlin come to life through 2018 Playmate of the Year Nina Daniele. The way she kicks the *L* in PLAYBOY askew is especially clever, given the shifts inside the cover.

As a woman who has been reading PLAYBOY for years, I've always felt as though I was sneaking in the back door of a gentlemen's club. I shrugged off the cigar smoke and sexist jokes because I drew so much inspiration from the Playmates—it was their club, after all. In this issue, with all the great features and the new tagline "Entertainment for All," it feels like the front door is wide open and the cigar smoke has cleared. Thanks, PLAYBOY, for inviting me in.

*C.C. Havens
North Park, Colorado*

ALL HAIL NINA

I bought my very first PLAYBOY because the amazing and beautiful Nina Daniele deserves all the love and support in the world. It's great supporting strong, empowering women who are in full control of their bodies. She makes this world a brighter, more beautiful place not only through her fashion and memes but because of her incredible spirit.

*Patrick Lacsina
Toronto, Ontario*

Congratulations to 2018 Playmate of the Year Nina Daniele and her cover. It reminds me of the May 1964 cover—one of the best.

*Rick Givler
Bellingham, Washington*

FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT

Call me naive, but I believe our vote still counts. The fact that a foreign power interfered with the 2016 election shows we need more election integrity. The risk-limiting audit solution Steve Friess presents in *We Demand a Recount* (May/June) is one method of ensuring our elections are decided by voters and not by outside influences. Since the founding of America, people have protested, fought and died for the right to vote. We should put aside political leanings and ensure that one of our most basic rights is protected.

*Andrew Bejarano
Las Cruces, New Mexico*

A FAMILY AFFAIR

The girl next door featured in the April 1967 issue of PLAYBOY was Gwen Wong—my



Playmate of the Year Nina Daniele evokes the Femlin for a legendary cover.

amazing mom (*Heritage*, March/April). I'm pretty sure she was named Miss April because of me. Although I was only five years old at the time, I'll never forget the moments I spent with Mom in the Bunny room. Watching her and the other Bunnies adjusting their ears and tails was mesmerizing. Many older women still desire to be captivating, just like their beautiful moms. At the age of 56, I'm finally comfortable in my own skin for the first time and ready to shake my own bunny tail.

*April Jayne
Los Angeles, California*

HOT ISSUE

A bit of Biology 101 for your *Playboy Advisor* writer, who informed a reader that keeping one's testes cool and free-swinging will increase the volume of semen, or "cum," as she calls it (May/June). Testes produce spermatozoa and testosterone, and they aren't hollow. Semen, or ejaculate—the juice that carries spermatozoa up and out of the urethra—is

produced by the prostate gland, which is inside the body cavity and is at body temperature, which the Advisor claims is 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. Not necessarily. Normal temps can vary from approximately 96 to 99 degrees and fluctuate during the course of a day. And—to digress—the Advisor's body temperature is lowest during menstruation and highest during ovulation.

*Earl Flaherty
East Machias, Maine*

FAITH RENEWED

When I saw the news that Playboy was mulling a shutdown of the print edition, with much sadness I quickly renewed my subscription in an attempt to support the publication and hopefully change your minds.

I love the *Heritage* section that honors the great history of the magazine and showcases some of the incredibly beautiful, sexy women who so memorably built the foundation of PLAYBOY. Hopefully it shows today's women

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DEAR PLAYBOY

that they don't need to resort to synthetic methods in order to be lovely.

I have to convey that I'm impressed with your recent design and content. I would be greatly saddened to see the magazine, now at the pinnacle of its evolution, end its glorious history as an American icon and standard of excellence in entertainment and journalism.

Phil Bevans

Portland, Oregon

Fear not, Phil. The magazine isn't going anywhere anytime soon.

NEW DETECTIVE IN TOWN

Killing Town, the novel excerpted in the March/April issue, has a history readers may like to know about. Back in 1946, newly married Frank Morrison Spillane (later known as Mickey Spillane) needed extra cash, so he decided to write a novel featuring a detective named Mike Hammer. The manuscript bore no title, and by what may be called a quirk of the cosmos, Spillane abandoned it after typing 30 single-spaced pages. He then began another Mike Hammer story, titled *I, the Jury*. He finished this second manuscript in 19 days. The book was published in 1947 and went on to sell 6.5 million copies by December 1948.

Spillane's typewriter went silent in 2006. Since then, his close friend Max Allan Collins, a writer and also the literary executor of Spillane's estate, has been busy editing and completing the many unfinished manuscripts of America's most famous crime novelist. *Killing Town* is the 11th of the Spillane manuscripts completed by Collins.

Ken Crockett

Austin, Texas

ALL BETS ON APRIL

As I await the crowning of your 2018 Playmate of the Year, I can't help anticipating that another April Playmate will receive the 2019 PMOY title after seeing Nereyda Bird's breathtaking pictorial (*Bird of Paradise*) in your March/April issue. Wow! What a beautiful, dynamic young woman. She certainly has my vote.

Josh Fehrens

Toronto, Ontario

Thanks for the feedback, Josh. We wouldn't be surprised if you were on the money come 2019.

CURVE APPEAL

I became a subscriber again after watching the excellent docuseries on Hugh Hefner (*Amazon's American Playboy*). I really like the look and design of the magazine, but I



Dames and dirty cops: Mike Hammer is back.

have one complaint. Why are all the women so skinny? They are absolutely beautiful, but I see no curves anywhere. When it comes to pictorials, I prefer the women in your *Heritage* section.

Alan Dunagan

Cincinnati, Ohio

We're glad to have you back, Alan. We hope that the voluptuous beauties in this issue's Mane Stay and Sun Song pictorials will reassure you of our commitment to curves.

MERCI BEAUCOUP

California girl and June Playmate Cassandra Dawn exudes the hot "girl next door" vibe (*California Dreaming*, May/June). I would love to see more of her in future issues. And if all the women in Paris look like Elisa Meliani (*Mediterranean Morning*), then PLAYBOY should feature French models more frequently. The lovely Elisa has a charming smile and amazing curves. She is a definite new favorite.

Paul Marini

Erie, Pennsylvania

BALANCING ACT

Your magazine has gone through a lot of changes lately—or "evolved," as you like to

put it. I have been reading it since it came out, but the *Playboy Interview* with Cecile Richards, then president of Planned Parenthood, made me sick (May/June). Richards claims that "a lot of [men] in office...don't believe that women should be able to have sex freely." Are you kidding? Richards also thinks men don't want women to have power. Look at President Trump's administration. He has many women at cabinet rank and also many advisors who are women. This is not new. The past several presidential administrations have had women in powerful positions, and many women serve as chief executives.

PLAYBOY, while making great strides in photography, has gotten too liberal. Name one conservative moral value that you espouse. Here's an idea for your magazine: Run an interview with Mike Pence. I would love to hear what he has to say on some of these issues. Try to put some balance in your material, but keep up the great pictorials.

Name withheld

Peachtree City, Georgia

We think you'll be pleased with our profile of left-baiting renegade Jordan Peterson on page 136. Send us your thoughts; we're always up for a lively debate.

DARIÉN UPDATE

A lot of our readers want to know what became of the *Where the Road Ends* motorcycle crew featured in our May/June story *Surviving the Darién Gap*. Author Scott Yorko fills us in: "Three of the four members of the crew continued their journey south with little issue other than a few flat tires and a painful case of something called 'monkey butt' from so much time in the saddle. On March 27 they logged 18,571 miles and rolled into a parking lot in Ushuaia, Argentina. They were exhausted but couldn't help staring across the Strait of Magellan. 'Nobody's ever crossed Antarctica on a motorcycle before,' someone piped up. What started as a joke quickly became a serious conversation."

COVER STORY

Our Rabbit alights on the pooch's muzzle to bask in the glow of cover model Sarah Stephens. Man's best friend? Indeed.



E-mail letters@playboy.com, or write

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WORLD of PLAYBOY

Anointing Nina

On May 4, we honored 2018 Playmate of the Year Nina Daniele with an intimate brunch at Hollywood's Beauty & Essex. Guests dined amid a dreamy swirl of roses and rosé to the accompaniment of live jazz and celebratory speeches, including a warm welcome from August 2000 Playmate Summer Altice (pictured bottom right). The highlight: a powerful statement from the guest of honor, whose poise and pluck on the podium reaffirmed that the Bronx beauty was the perfect choice to wear the PMOY crown. "Posing nude is a metaphor for building my armor," said Nina. "The stronger I become, the more I have a chance to show other women that we are beautiful because we say we are."





Bunnies in the Beltway

As a brand that's been pushing buttons for six decades and counting, Playboy has long celebrated (and relied on) the First Amendment. That's why this past April our Rabbit headed to Washington, D.C. to host the No Tie Party, a bipartisan celebration of politics and the press following the White House Correspondents' Dinner. A bevy of stylish guests enjoyed an evening of music, magic and mingling while sipping Swish Beverages' Pink Party Rosé With Bubbles. Turns out the only thing better than standing up for freedom of expression is doing so in the company of Bunnies.



1. Cooper Hefner with Sarah Huckabee Sanders at the White House Correspondents' Dinner. 2. Playboy CEO Ben Kohn with Kyle Richards and Mauricio Umansky. 3. Cooper with Representative Nancy Pelosi at the WHCD. 4. and 5. The decor was impeccable, inside and out. 6. Cooper with Don Lemon and Jordan Klepper. 7. Hasan Piker flanked by Bunnies. 8. Performance-art duo the Bumbys read the crowd. 9. Playboy White House correspondent Brian J. Karem and friends. 10. Miguel throws down.

Desert Lights

We kicked off Coachella with Playboy Social Club Palm Springs, a two-day event that paired poolside glamour with grammable moments galore. Sponsored by Stillhouse Whiskey, Golden Road Brewing and Babe Rosé With Bubbles, the event included visits from Halsey, G-Eazy and Teyana Taylor. For invitations to future Playboy events, become a Key Holder at Playboy.com.



1. PBSC takes over a private boutique hotel. 2. Pop-rap power couple Halsey and G-Eazy hold court. 3. Teyana Taylor lounges in lace. 4. Singer-songwriter Anthony Russo croons for the crowd. 5. Fire-dancers turn up the heat.



WORLD OF PLAYBOY

REMEMBERING *Art Paul*

1925 - 2018

There would be no Playboy without Hugh Hefner, and there would be no Rabbit Head without Art Paul. We lost a truly irreplaceable member of the Playboy family when the magazine's founding art director and creator of its storied logo passed away in April at the age of 93. "I designed the logo to depict the lighter side of life," wrote Paul in an early memo about the Rabbit Head, which remains a case study in design and one of the most recognizable symbols in the world. Paul was also responsible for some of PLAYBOY's most unforgettable covers during his 29-year tenure as the magazine's creative steward, and though he left the company in 1982, he kept busy to the end. We profiled Paul in a *Heritage* feature just three issues ago; in it, he gives voice to his muse—at once utopian and earthy, demanding and democratic: "I was guided by PLAYBOY's spirit of change and the idea that there should be no 'high' art or 'low' art, that good design could be applied to anything."

No one can visualize that spirit like you, Art. Rest in peace.



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GALLERIES



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Clara McGregor isn't just the daughter of film legend Ewan; she's also your latest crush. Key Holders can unlock all of Playboy.com's NSFW galleries—including Clara's, shot by Julian Ungano—and enjoy new pictorials every week.

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READ



A Stoned Affair

Would you trade wedding-day champagne toasts for nuptial bong hits? Playboy.com met dozens of vendors who gathered at the first Cannabis Wedding Expo, held this year in Los Angeles, for a report on the rise of weed weddings.

✂
EXCLUSIVES

Mastodon Rising

Playboy.com's Chris Walker shadowed the Atlanta-bred four-piece at a recent Red Rocks show and found that they're still experimenting—and affirming the importance of heavy metal. Not to miss: Jacki Vitetta's stunning photography.



✂
PRODUCTS



Summer Fest Style Guide

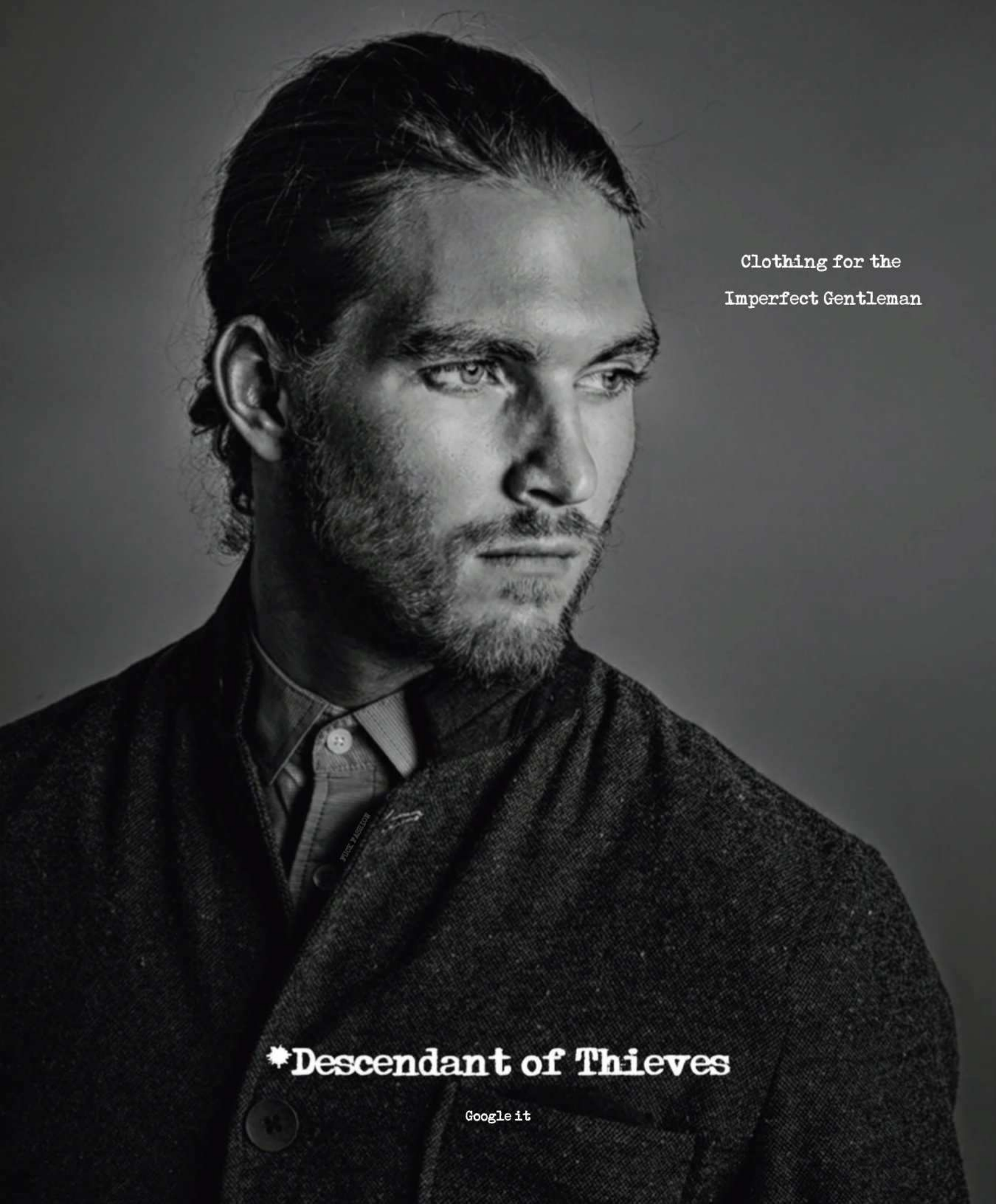
Just arrived: Joyrich x Playboy's summer festival collection, an eclectic array of sparkling tees and jersey robes for all sexes. Visit Playboy.com for Key Holder deals on our entire lineup of must-have offerings, from collaborations like this to our Pride-inspired Rabbit Head tees.

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LET'S PLAY

CAROLINE VREELAND

Musician, model and bon vivant Caroline Vreeland has heard it a thousand times: “There are people who are like, ‘Oh, she’s hot and has big tits,’ and then, ‘She sings? Who knew?’” With her first EP slated to drop later this year, that decidedly myopic perception is about to shift. The Marin County native started singing at the age of eight; when she moved to Los Angeles a decade later, she could easily have leveraged her family name—she’s the great-granddaughter of legendary *Vogue* editor in chief Diana Vreeland. “I was always a little bit bratty about the Diana thing,” she says. “Of course I honored it, but I thought it was important for me to make my own name for myself.” Soon her charisma, her Jessica Rabbit body and her well-documented love of food and wine helped her do just that, transforming her into a social-media force. Once the fashion world caught on, music fell by the wayside, but with the release of her bluesy new single “Unbreakable Love” she’s reintroducing herself as an artist who can evoke the Weeknd and Patsy Cline in a single verse. “I think that was just my journey,” she says of her years away from music. “But now it’s time.” Not a moment too soon.—Rebecca Haithcoat

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
GRAHAM DUNN



FOOD

WHERE THERE'S A GRILL, THERE'S A WAY

You've mastered steaks, burgers and corn; now upgrade your grill skills by expanding your repertoire

BY **MACKENZIE FEGAN**

There is nothing primal about an Instant Pot. And with summer on the wing, it's time to embrace your inner cave dweller and cook with fire. For next-level grilling, think beyond the usual suspects and reach for unorthodox ingredients that can benefit from smoke and scorch. Just as the high heat of glowing charcoal can yield a hard-seared steak that's still bloody on the inside, a charred tomato or cucumber will serve up those rich, browned flavors without sacrificing peak-produce juiciness. As for smoke, treat it like an extra ingredient. To lock in its flavor, fat is your friend, as in chef Galen Zamarra's butter-topped oysters (pictured, with recipe below, along with other tips from some of our favorite chefs). You won't get blazing hot temperatures or that ideal smokiness from a gas grill—though wood chips can be used as a cheat—so if you came to play, it's charcoal all the way (and we mean hardwood lump charcoal, not chemical-laced briquettes). You go, grill.

Tomatoes: Toss cocktail or cherry tomatoes with olive oil and place on grill (a colander or grill basket is helpful) for about five minutes, until they blister open. Puree and season with salt. Spoon over steamed clams with garlic, oregano and Tabasco, or use instead of lemon in sauces and dressings for a smoky, acidic kick. (*Ashley Rath, the Grill, New York*)

Soft-shell crabs: Place boiled soft-shell crabs on grill over direct heat, allowing shells to char but not burn—eight to 10 seconds per side. Move crabs to cooler side of grill until warmed through, three to five minutes. Place in a large mixing bowl, toss with Old Bay seasoning and serve with melted butter. (*Elise Kornack, former*

Take Root chef whose new project launches next year in the Catskills)

Leeks: Trim leeks and wash well. Place over direct heat on grill for five to 10 minutes, letting outer layer blacken. Peel away and discard charred outer layer. Top leeks with Parmesan or pecorino, cracked black pepper and a runny fried egg. (*Elizabeth Haigh, Shibui, London*)

Beef heart: Cut heart into quarter-inch slices and thread on wooden skewers. Marinate in neutral oil, vinegar, salt, pepper, cumin, garlic and *aji panca* (a mild, fruity Peruvian pepper) for two hours in refrigerator. Grill until medium, three to five minutes, brushing with leftover marinade. Serve skewers topped with salsa. (*Erik Ramirez, Llama Inn, Brooklyn*)

Fennel: Halve a fennel bulb and grill five minutes per side over direct heat. Slice crosswise and mix with supremed orange wedges, Castelvetrano olives, high-quality olive oil, chardonnay vinegar, tarragon and mint. Season with salt and red chili flakes. (*Negro Piattoni, Mettā, Brooklyn*)

Oysters: Make a mignonette compound butter by mixing sautéed shallots, lemon zest and thyme into softened butter. Chill until solid. Shuck medium-size, meaty oysters, being careful not to spill juices. For each oyster, place half a teaspoon of compound butter on the meat and replace the top shell. Grill over indirect heat until the butter melts and the oyster is just warmed through, about three minutes. Finish with a squeeze of lemon. (*Galen Zamarra, Mas, New York*)

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GRANT CORNETT**







SEX

A Polyamory Primer

You've thought about it, dreamed about it, maybe even dabbled in it—but are you brave enough to manage multiple intimate relationships? We're here to help

WORDS AND ILLUSTRATION BY
SOPHIE LUCIDO JOHNSON

You know the line. In one form or another, it has graced virtually every romantic comedy since the days of Shakespeare. It's spoken by a friend on the night before the hero of the story is to be married.

"Well," says the friend, "this is your last night as a free man."

I can think of nothing bleaker than the idea that wanting to share a life with someone should be synonymous with losing one's freedom. Humans follow these rules because, at some point, humans *made* these rules. And we're just as capable of breaking them.

Polyamory, according to an early definition, is "the practice, state or ability of having more than one sexual loving relationship at the same time, with the full knowledge and consent of all partners involved." Note the emphasis on "full knowledge and consent." This is not sleeping around, "keeping things casual" or cheating. This is an arrangement in which the rules are malleable, and it involves a lot—like, a *lot*—of talking.

The practice of polyamory is nothing new—in America it dates back to at least the 1800s—but it's enjoying a resurgence. Couples are waiting to get married (or are not marrying at all), they're having children later in life (or not at all), and fewer children than in previous generations are being raised in heterosexual, two-parent households. As the typical modern family changes, so do the expectations around relationships.

My partner and I are polyamorous. We're committed to each other, but the commitment is not about sex; it's a promise to emotionally support each other throughout our lives. We

date and sleep with other people, and we tell each other about all of it. When I talk to people about our relationship, they'll often say, "I don't think I could do that; I'd get too jealous." And I relate: I am not free of jealousy. But the thing about jealousy is that with a lot of honest conversation, it can change—and fade.

I'm not suggesting that polyamorous relationships are easier than monogamous ones. If you're going to pursue love, you have to decide what you're willing to sacrifice: In a traditional relationship, you sacrifice the possibility of ever sleeping with anyone else again; in a polyamorous one, you sacrifice the comforting idea that your relationship structure will always stay the same. I vastly prefer the latter sacrifice; it's a good psychological exercise, and I ultimately learn more about myself. But polyamory isn't right for everyone. In a poly relationship, you have to work *through* jealousy rather than around it. I find that this—the practice of feeling my feelings and being conversational about them—brings me a lot closer to my partners.

A common fear around polyamory is that your partner will fall in love with someone else and you might lose them. Here's the bottom line: Your partner *might* fall in love with someone else, and you *might* lose the structure of the relationship you're in right now. Think of it this way: Parents with multiple children can love all their offspring equally,

if in different ways, and the same is possible for romantic love. As long as all partners in a polyamorous configuration are transparent about their thoughts and feelings throughout a relationship, a shift in its structure shouldn't come as a surprise. That doesn't mean it doesn't hurt, but it shouldn't traumatize anyone.

If you're interested in opening up your relationship, prepare to experience some tough feelings and take partial ownership of the equally tough feelings of your partner. One of the biggest newbie mistakes when it comes to polyamory is defensiveness: If your partner feels jealous that you're spending time with someone new, your impulse might be to accuse them of overreacting. The best advice I've received about dating multiple people is that if one person is hurting, it's up to everyone else to nurture that person. Sometimes that isn't what you want to do—but it makes all the difference.

I want to briefly add that my sex life is amazing. I've lived out every sexual fantasy I've ever had, and now I'm working on developing new ones. The key is to get tested any time you engage with a new partner or partners and to be open and up-front with all your partners about sexual health.

Also, condoms. Lots and lots of condoms.

*Sophie Lucido Johnson is the author of **Many Love: A Memoir of Polyamory and Finding Love(s)** (Touchstone, 2018).*



Are Open Relationships Right for You?

START
HERE

The most important thing
in a relationship is:

COMMUNICATION

GOOD
SEX

LOYALTY

What was your last
breakup about?

WE WERE JUST
TOO DIFFERENT.

JEALOUSY
OR A
LACK OF
TRUST.

Your partner says
s/he thinks a stranger
is hot. How does that
make you feel?

CURIOUS

INDIFFERENT

FURIOUS

How much time do you
like to spend talking
things through with
your significant
other?

A LOT—
AT LEAST
AN HOUR
A DAY.

TBH, I'D
RATHER
BE
FUCKING.

I'M NOT
A BIG
TALKER, BUT
I'LL DO IT
IF THAT'S
WHAT MAKES
HIM/HER
HAPPY.

True or false:
All relationships
change in ways people
can't anticipate.

TRUE

FALSE

What would you
say if your partner
got jealous?

"I UNDERSTAND YOUR
FEELING. LET'S
TALK MORE ABOUT
IT; I'LL LISTEN."

"YOU HAVE NO
REASON TO BE
JEALOUS."

What are you
looking for in
your next
relationship?

A DEEP,
INTIMATE
CONNECTION.

LOTS AND LOTS
OF SEX.

THAT IT'S
NATURAL.

THAT IT'S
ANNOYING.

When people
around you have
intense emotions,
you tend to feel...

When you get jealous
you...

BOTTLE
IT UP.

ACT OUT OR
GET ANGRY.

The open relationship
you could see trying is:

KITCHEN TABLE:
EVERYONE IS UP-FRONT
ABOUT ALL ROMANTIC
OR SEXUAL ENCOUNTERS
SUCH THAT EVERY PARTICIPANT
WOULD FEEL COMFORTABLE
SITTING AROUND A
TABLE TOGETHER.

DON'T ASK,
DON'T TELL:
YOU AND YOUR
PARTNER CAN
DATE OR HOOK
UP WITH WHOMEVER
YOU WANT, BUT YOU
DON'T GO INTO
DETAIL WITH
EACH OTHER.

HARD TO SAY;
YOU KEEP THINKING
ABOUT YOUR
PARTNER'S SIDE OF
THE DEAL.

TALK ABOUT
IT WITH THE
PERSON INVOLVED.

you should
try

Polyamory

You're
D.T.F.

Stick with
monogamy

A deeply committed open relationship may be for you. Talk to your significant other about people you'd like to see or sexual fantasies you'd like to explore, but understand your partner's limits and feelings. Carve out time to deal with the jealousy that will naturally arise. And make sure your current relationship is stable enough to withstand some big change.

You're all about the bedroom; ain't nothing wrong with that! Make sure you're up-front and 100 percent honest about what you want—sex, sex and lots of sex—and then enjoy physical relationships with people who want the same thing. Get tested regularly and use multiple forms of protection. Have fun! Sex is the best.

You believe in structure and loyalty, and that's beautiful. Jealousy is detrimentally intense for you; the solution, once again, is to communicate at every turn. Carry on your search for the One! If you've found him or her, honor and fight for that singular bond. Monogamy seems to be working just fine for half the population, if the divorce rate is any indicator.



TV

THE SEARCHER

Hot on the heels of *Sicario*, *Hell or High Water* and *Wind River*, **Taylor Sheridan** turns the Western on its head

It's cowboys and Indians all over again. *Yellowstone*, the flagship show of the Paramount Network (a rebrand of Spike TV), inevitably brings to

BY **STEVE PALOPOLI**

mind that somewhat outdated phrase, but this time it's the cow-

boys who are desperately trying to protect their land, all 900,000 acres of it, from Native Americans who believe they now have manifest destiny on their side. And rather than engaging in outright warfare, the tribe's plan involves political intrigue, media spin and casino cash.

Premiering June 20, *Yellowstone* turns the Western upside down and inside out. It follows a fictional ranching family in present-day Montana who will stop at nothing to maintain control of their holdings as they clash with a neighboring reservation—as well as rapacious developers and meddling government officials.

Although modernized and revisionist, *Yellowstone* also draws on many themes of the classic Western: families divided by politics and principles; chaos and uncertainty as one era of history ends and another begins; and a constant struggle over the last remaining frontiers. Which is why it must have come from the one guy in Hollywood who seems to understand how relevant those themes make the Western right now. Series creator Taylor Sheridan (pictured)—who wrote and directed all 10 episodes of *Yellowstone*'s first season—has been circling the genre for the past few years, beginning in 2015 with his screenplay for the border drug-war thriller *Sicario*. (He also wrote the sequel, *Sicario: Day of the Soldado*, out June 29.) He dove deeper into Western themes with his Oscar-nominated script for 2016's *Hell or High Water*, as well as with 2017's *Wind River*, a murder mystery set on a Wyoming reservation, which he wrote and



directed. But with this show he fully embraces the uniquely American tradition, even as he subverts it.

"I think *Yellowstone*, albeit modern-day, is probably the truest Western of them," says Sheridan. "I was a huge fan of Westerns as a kid—I still am. In my head I was saying, If John Ford came back to life today and wanted to do a series, how would he film it? I looked at *The Searchers*. I watched a number of his films. *Fort Apache* was extremely influential on the visual style of *Yellowstone*."

Indeed, the series is packed with many of the visual and thematic touches that have become hallmarks of Sheridan's work, with claustrophobic physical and emotional standoffs between characters set against vast, sweeping landscapes. ("I try to really build on the fact that you can be backed into a corner on a 900,000-acre ranch," he says.)

But it adds a new element: the classic Western patriarch. As played by Kevin Costner, John Dutton is the kind of antihero whose ruthless drive to dominate everything in sight somehow doesn't contradict his genuine heartbreak over being denied the chance to spend time with his only grandson.

"Take the characters in any of them, whether it's *Sicario* or *Hell or High Water* or *Wind River*. You're taking ordinary people and placing them in extraordinary circumstances," Sheridan says. "But if you think about the kind of person it takes to run, own and maintain an operation that massive, it has to be someone who has a politician's sense of swagger or charm or presence."

Costner brings all three to *Yellowstone*. "There's no one else who could do this role," Sheridan says. "He's been doing this for, you know, 40 years. If you're doing something dumb, he will tell you it's dumb. And he'll probably be right."

For the 48-year-old Sheridan, who broke into Hollywood as an actor on shows including *Veronica Mars* and *Sons of Anarchy*, the relevance of the modern-day Western hits close to home. "You write what you know, to a certain degree," he says. "I grew up in Texas. We had a ranch, and we lost that ranch. Elements of that influenced my life and writing."

Even though he paints its characters in shades of gray rather than stark black and white, Sheridan is up-front about the fact that his sympathies don't lie with the ranchers on *Yellowstone*. He thinks the show's Indian Nation, whose claim to the land is older than the Duttons', is most justified in its actions. In the aftermath of Native American-led protests against the Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipelines, it's an urgent message: If Westerns are going to get their much-deserved comeback, it's high time the Indians won. ■



This country wasn't built by those who sit idly by. It wasn't built by braggarts and blowhards. Our country was built by those who pick life up by the bootstraps and conquer the challenge. Our vodka is crafted in the USA with that same spirit, because that's what makes us countrymen. Whether you're strapping on your boots, or kicking them off,

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with

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GOLD STAR
VODKA



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BY **STEVE PALOPOLI**

*For the past decade, producer **Jason Blum** has been stretching budgets and the allegorical potential of horror cinema. Can he survive the glare of *Get Out*'s success?*

CAUTIONARY TALES





MOVIES

Get Out may have garnered more critical acclaim, *Paranormal Activity* may have raked in more dollars and *Split* may have ginned up more buzz for its jaw-dropping twist, but the heart and soul of Blumhouse Productions is arguably the series that began with 2013's *The Purge*.

That may be because Blumhouse founder Jason Blum sees *The Purge* the same way he sees himself—as an underdog with something to prove and even more to say.

“People don’t see it in the United States,” says Blum of the barbed thread of social commentary that runs through the *Purge* saga. “In France, *The Purge* was called *American Nightmare*. In Europe, people understand because they’re not insane about guns. They understand how crazy our gun laws are, and they totally understand *The Purge* as a cautionary tale.”

Keep in mind, he’s referring to a series that has made almost \$216 million in the U.S. over three films with a combined budget of \$22 million. But it’s not just about the money. As they’ve gotten better with each sequel, the *Purge* films have shown that Blum’s devotion to darkly allegorical stories told by unknown talents can actually work out for everyone involved—especially the movie-going public.

Written and directed by James DeMonaco, the first *Purge* movie had a killer hook—a totalitarian regime called the New Founding Fathers of America has declared an annual tradition during which all crime is legal (except for the murder of a politician, of course) for 12 hours—but devolved in the second half into home-invasion cliché. Over the course of two sequels, however, DeMonaco dug deeper into the festering class tensions probed in the first film and delivered the kind of politically freighted action-horror mini-masterpieces that no one has pulled off since John Carpenter in his prime.

A prequel, *The First Purge*, arrives on July 4. Written by DeMonaco, this installment is directed by up-and-comer Gerard McMurray, the African American filmmaker whose *Burning Sands* touched off controversy for its portrayal of hazing at black fraternities. The new film, set on the night of the very first Purge,

follows a group of African American characters as they discover the deadly (well, *more* deadly) conspiracy at the center of the New Founding Fathers’ social experiment.

“In the last movie, James somehow foresaw Trump getting elected, which was pretty incredible,” says Blum. “But with the next movie, we move from kind of a class war to a race war.”

Blum has gravitated toward unique cinematic visions ever since he secured financing for 1995’s *Kicking and Screaming* (the winsome post-college comedy, not the Will Ferrell vehicle). He launched Blumhouse in 2000 and, nine years later, homed in on horror with his first big success, Oren Peli’s micro-budget shocker *Paranormal Activity*.

“I was very lucky that *Paranormal* happened when it did,” says Blum. “I was doing different things in the movie business, and I couldn’t find my niche. I spent 15 years half in studio production and half in independent. I loved independent production, but I hated independent distribution. *Paranormal Activity* was a totally independently produced movie released by a very traditional big studio.”

That became Blum’s model, and the roster of auteurs he has backed over the past decade is a

testament to his eye for singular filmmaking talent. Case in point: His ability to understand what’s important about their work is the reason *Get Out* was successfully marketed as piercing social commentary rather than B-grade horror.

“I really do bet on people,” says Blum. “What I like is going to an undervalued talent and trying to edge them into more commercial territory.” Lest anyone cry “sellout,” consider the fiery national discussion sparked by *Get Out*.

When Jordan Peele accepted the Oscar for best original screenplay earlier this year, it seemed to mark the fulfillment of Blum’s dream for his horror hit factory. And with an upcoming slate of films that includes *Glass*, the *Unbreakable* threequel from M. Night Shyamalan; an offbeat sequel to *Halloween*; Spike Lee’s *BlacKkKlansman*; and Todd McFarlane’s *Spawn*, Blumhouse has some true “event” movies on the way. But Blum says that while the company will continue to evolve, it won’t abandon its core mission.

“Everyone asks, ‘Now that you’ve made *Get Out*, are you going to go make Oscar movies?’ The answer is definitely not. I really like feeling like an outsider, an underdog,” he says. “The last thing I’m looking for is the next *Get Out*.” ■

AUTEURS ‘R’ US

A handful of the best (and weirdest) filmmakers Jason Blum has backed

Noah Baumbach: Five years before starting Blumhouse Productions, Blum helped Baumbach, his college roommate, get financing for his first film, *Kicking and Screaming*. Part of Blum’s strategy was to attach to the script a letter of endorsement from family friend Steve Martin before sending it around Hollywood.

James Wan and Leigh Whannell: This directing-writing pair, who scored a huge hit with 2004’s *Saw* but were dogged by its (somewhat undeserved) “torture porn” rep, found redemption with their hit series of *Insidious* films (top left) for Blumhouse.

Damien Chazelle: A jazz film is the last thing one would expect



from Blumhouse, but Blum produced Chazelle’s acclaimed 2014 *Whiplash* (right).

Scott Derrickson: The director and co-writer of Blumhouse’s massively profitable *Sinister* (and co-writer of its sequel) went on to direct Marvel’s *Doctor Strange*.

Jordan Peele: Previously best known as a sketch comedian, Peele worried that his directorial debut would fail. Instead, produced by Blumhouse for \$4.5 million, *Get Out* (lower left) went on to earn \$255 million worldwide and bag four Oscar nominations.

ILLUSTRATION BY WEBUYYOURKIDS

DRAWN

PLAYBOY PROUDLY PRESENTS

DATA

ILLUSTRATED BY TIMBA

NEW EDITION

JULY/
AUG
'18

SIGNIFICA, INSIGNIFICA,

STATS AND FACTS



FOURTH FACTS

818 **HOT DOGS**

are eaten in America **EVERY SECOND** from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

In the **30 DAYS** surrounding July 4, a daily average of

250 Americans

go to the emergency room for fireworks-related injuries.

Itsy-Bitsy, TEENY-WEENY

72 YEARS

age of the two-piece swimsuit known as the **BIKINI**, designed by Louis Réard

30

square inches of fabric used to create **RÉARD'S** garment

1964

year of the inaugural **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED** Swimsuit Issue

CELLULOID SWIMWEAR

ONE MILLION YEARS B.C.

1966 movie in which Raquel Welch wore what would become an iconic bikini, lined with fur



33%

OF THE INJURIES ARE TO HANDS AND FINGERS

20%

TO THE HEAD, FACE OR EARS

18%

TO THE LEGS



1,085

number of participants in the world's **LARGEST** bikini parade, organized by the municipal government of Huludao, China in 2012

\$61,500

2001 auction price of the belted bikini Ursula Andress wore in 1962's **DR. NO**

2002

year in which Halle Berry, in **DIE ANOTHER DAY**, returned the Bond girl to her sartorial roots with an electric-orange version of Andress's bikini

60

percentage of China's total production of **EMOTIONAL INTEREST UNDERWEAR**—a.k.a. lingerie—credited to the small town of Dongwangji



20 GALLONS

amount of urine released by swimmers into a 220,000-GALLON public pool over the course of a three-week-period



Selfie-ASSURED

Your nose in selfies can look up to **30%** **LARGER** than it actually is.

55%

of facial plastic surgeons reported requests for procedures that would make recipients look **BETTER IN SELFIES**.



Old GLORY

3,000 pounds:

weight of the world's **LARGEST** American flag

17 feet:

height of each of its stars



Current AFFAIRS

20+

percentage of people who have engaged in **CONSENSUAL NON-MONOGAMY**

—playing around outside a relationship, with a partner's permission—according to a 2017 study

WE'RE OPEN



WORK-LIFE IMBALANCE

41%

of millennials would end a relationship if it meant they'd get a **Significant PROMOTION** at work

32%

would end it for a big raise.

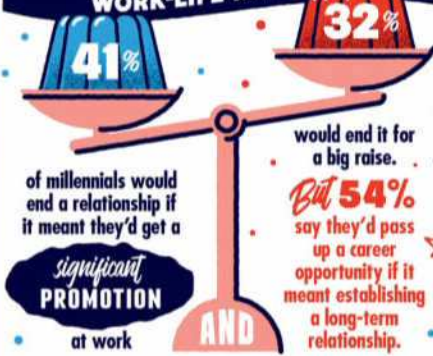
But 54%

say they'd pass up a career opportunity if it meant establishing a long-term relationship.

AND

Only 41%

of millennials say they've ended a relationship in person, as opposed to breaking it off by phone call, text, letter or e-mail.







POLITICS

Calling All *Super-Voters*

With the midterms drawing near, one of America's most influential thinkers echoes FDR's maxim that the real safeguard of democracy is education

I'm writing these words almost exactly 50 years after I sat for my first *Playboy Interview*. It took place at the Washington Hilton hotel; below us, Connecticut Avenue was full with cars fleeing the fiery protests immediately following the slaying of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis. The civil rights movement produced historic levels of activism and voter engagement, and many political observers believe the upcoming midterm elections will spark a new round of both. The obstacles to political action in the current political moment are significant but not insurmountable.

Over the past five decades we've seen ever-expanding control by global corporations over governments, technology, media, capital and labor. Changes have occurred in these areas that few would have anticipated, but the huge number of cynical nonvoters or poorly informed active ones has not significantly declined. The turnout of the voting-age population has been below 60 percent since 1968. And voters today, beset by even more issues, are relatively less informed than they were back then, despite the vast resources of the internet, live coverage of Congress by C-SPAN and instant free access to voting records.

Voter turnout in America is the lowest in the Western world. In some countries, such as Australia, voting is a duty. The United States is one of the few democracies in which voter registration is not automatic. To make matters worse, gerrymandering by both major parties is widespread, allowing politicians to pick their voters.

It's easy to demonstrate, starting with a weaker, corporatized Congress, that lawmakers are now more indentured to vested interests and less reflective of the people's necessities and need for justice than 50 years ago. The corporate state's attack on the poor, on labor, on consumer and environmental justice keeps expanding as companies export jobs, avoid taxes and profitably invade our privacy. Even state judicial elections are being corrupted with money: A report by the American Constitution Society titled "Justice at Risk" found a "significant relationship between business-group contributions to state supreme court justices and the voting of those justices in cases involving

business matters. The more campaign contributions from business interests justices receive, the more likely they are to vote for business litigants appearing before them in court."

What about training yourself to become a super-voter—a voter who can't be outsmarted by the cleverest of smooth-talking politicians? You can start by recognizing a fundamental fact: The Constitution starts with "We the People," not "We the Congress" or "We the Corporations." As a republic, we delegate power to elected representatives to govern, but ultimately we are the sovereign power.

We can take this power back fast. Start by showing up—which is half of democracy. Show up to vote, to run referenda, to attend town meetings, rallies, marches and, sometimes, to present citizen petitions summoning your lawmakers to your own meetings to address your agenda. Organizers from Indivisible, a progressive nonprofit, have developed a variety of tools to help citizens hold members of Congress accountable. Its "Missing Members of Congress Action Plan" provides useful suggestions for motivating elected representatives to talk with the citizenry.

Avoid being a single-issue advocate, which politicians know how to handle. Instead present several popular redirections, from electoral reforms to improvements for workers, consumers and the environment, upgraded infrastructure and a smarter military and foreign policy. Politicians will realize you've done your homework. They'll sense that you aren't going away and that you're likely to have broad public support.

Hand your elected officials a voter self-help guide that lists where you stand in contrast to where the candidates stand or have avoided the issues. This juxtaposes your positions with theirs in a concise, personal manner. It will be difficult for them to sloganize their way out of addressing your concerns. They know that asking knowledgeable, tough questions is itself power, especially when you can publicize your positions on social media.

When they talk of starting wars, such as the undeclared criminal war of aggression against

Iraq, you can ask, "What's your legal authority to do this under our Constitution and laws?" Many of these military actions are not legal—and both parties are guilty. As Yale law professor Bruce Ackerman wrote in *The New York Times*, "The legal machinations Mr. Obama has used to justify war without Congressional consent set a troubling precedent that could allow future administrations to wage war at their convenience—free of legislative checks and balances." Truth be known, politicians are most fearful of questions from 10-year-olds, such as "Why are you taking money from polluters?" or "Why do you have health insurance and we don't?" Students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida have made politicians answer tough questions about gun control. Learn from them.



You have time to be a smart voter. You need only 10 to 20 hours of study between Labor Day and the midterms to absorb the necessary facts to choose candidates who will do right and not betray you—or you can write in your own candidate as a protest vote. And if you ever doubt your power, consider this: As I describe in my book *Breaking Through Power*, one percent or less of the voters in a congressional district can be the deciding factor in a serious push for changes backed by a majority opinion; that's true regardless of the corporate lobbies.

We live in a country that has far more problems than we deserve and far more solutions than we apply. It's time to hold up standards that will shift power back to "We the People." ■

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM TORO

AHEAD OF THE CURVE



Not shown
actual size.

**Limited
Collector's
Edition**

Damascus steel forged to throw them for a curve at only \$79

For centuries, a Damascus steel blade was instantly recognizable and commanded immediate respect. Recognizable because the unique and mysterious smelting process left a one-of-a-kind, rippled texture on the steel, and respected because Damascus steel's sharp edge and resistance to shattering were the stuff of legend. If you carried Damascus steel, you were ahead of the curve.

Today, you can own the legend.

The **Damascus Curva Knife** celebrates those legendary blades. It uses modern Damascus steel, with the same rippled texture pattern on the blade, to create a curved folding knife that's 7 1/2" in total length. With a liner lock mechanism, which allows the knife to be opened and closed using just one hand, and an ergonomic handle made of buffalo horn and colored bone, this \$79 knife is a trophy for any hunter or collector.

Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed. Feel the knife in your hands, wear it on your hip, inspect the impeccable craftsmanship of Damascus steel. If you don't feel like we cut you a fair deal, send it back within 30 days for a complete refund of the item price. But we believe that once you hold the **Damascus Curva Knife**, you'll be ready to throw a curve of your own.

"The most common aspects of Damascus steel knives that enthusiasts consider ideal are the aesthetics and high performance." — Knife Informer

- Damascus steel blade & bolster • Buffalo horn & colored bone handle • Liner lock • Overall length, open : 7 1/2" • Includes genuine leather sheath



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What customers are saying about Stauer knives...

★★★★★

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Playboy Advisor

Sex columnist **Anna del Gaizo** goes long on male pubic hair. Plus, how to handle those sex tapes you made with your ex, a guide to lovemaking al fresco and more



Q: *While the stigma of being “metrosexual” really doesn’t exist anymore, I’m still not sure what the hell to do with my pubes. Do women expect me to have them buzzed down to nothing now? The last woman I was with made a face when she saw how much pubic hair I have, and now I’m rethinking the whole situation.—J.F., Mankato, Minnesota*

ILLUSTRATION BY ZOHAR LAZAR



A: Like your preferred sleeping position or Chipotle order, pubic-hair grooming is highly subjective. That said, an all-natural approach is almost antiquated at this point. Most of us are in favor of partial or complete elimination, for aesthetic or hygienic reasons or both. A lot of women wonder why we should be bombarded with fuzz when we're expected to maintain a sleek landing strip or be preternaturally smooth everywhere—but spite aside, few people like to plunge face-first into a mouthful of shrubbery because (a) it's distracting and (b) it makes our work more difficult. The first time I encountered a guy who was completely shaved, I thought, This is fucking weird. Eventually, it grew on me, so to speak, and I realized it makes for easy, clean access. Converted!

Don't feel you need to give yourself a buzz cut, but it would be wise to trim as part of your regular routine. Any awkwardly long, wayward hairs poking out? Banish them. If your bush is so bountiful it competes with your dick—say, if hairs are rising well into the shaft region—deal with it. Just use a pair of clippers, fine scissors or a proper body-hair groomer (like the Philips Norelco Bodygroom 7100). Proceed with caution, especially around your balls. Finally, consider the possibility that you misread the woman's expression and you're fine. But are you comfortable? You'll never please everyone, so groom or don't groom your pubes to the length and expanse that make you happy.

Q: *My boyfriend gets jealous if I hang out with other women. This is because I once admitted to him that I've messed around with a number of same-sex partners, but I'm definitely straight. That is, I'm not sexually attracted to women; I'm just open to experimentation. The jealousy rears its head whenever I make a new female friend or we're out and I'm spending more time with my girlfriends than with him. In those cases, his behavior becomes part territorial, part baby-sitter. How can I convince him that his jealousy is misplaced?*—B.P., Lafayette, Indiana

A: If a man is threatened by his straight girlfriend having female friends, imagine what else threatens him.

Jealousy is the result of a sense of ownership, which means your boyfriend is, on some level, worried that one of these femmes fatales will take away what rightfully belongs to him: you. Jealousy also stems from deep-rooted insecurity that likely has nothing to do with your behavior. So what if you've gone down on a couple of ladies? A similar situation in one of his previous relationships might be the culprit. Either way, the dude has issues with women and he's

misdirecting his mistrust, scrambling for a place to apply his fear and resentment. It's safe to say he's also pissed that he's not receiving the bulk of your attention. Is he a charismatic type with a strong personality? Thought so. But just because he's charming doesn't mean he's confident. You probably won't be able to convince him his jealousy is misplaced, because his feelings are irrational—and when logic retreats, so does hope. Besides, if your significant other can't be happy that you're enjoying downtime with your friends, then he doesn't deserve to enjoy downtime with you. Tell him to drop the bratty bullshit. If he doesn't, dump him and get with a real man—or woman, for that matter.

Q: *Is it unhealthy that I don't want to delete a bunch of homemade sex videos of my ex and me because I like to masturbate to them? We were together only six months, so I don't have a ton of residual feelings for her, and our breakup wasn't heartbreaking (that I'm aware of), but could this create problems for me down the road?*—T.D., Berlin, Germany

A: First off, are you currently in a relationship? If you are, and you continue to invite your ex to your personal party, then, yes, obviously there's a problem—and you'll surely have a bigger one down the road, particularly if your new girlfriend should stumble into your phone's photo app. (And by "stumble," I mean "break into it the moment it's unlocked and you're not looking." People can sense these things.) If you're single, then, hey, no damage done. It's your amateur porn and you can watch it as frequently and ferociously as you damn well please—unless your favorite video vixen explicitly told you to delete the content, in which case you need to get rid of it out of respect for her. Just make sure you can get off without the assistance of your homemade films and that they're not causing you to blow off plans with prospective partners. Keep your viewing sessions infrequent, and mix up your masturbation routine by watching porn you didn't direct and star in yourself. Better yet, use your imagination.

Q: *I keep having sex with a woman I don't really like. It happens when I'm bored—or drunk. I'm not attracted to her, and the sex is mediocre at best. She, on the other hand, says I'm the best she's ever had, and I think that's because she's in love with me. I can't tell if I'm doing it out of pity, insecurity or basic boredom. I don't need advice on how to simply "break it off"—as soon as I start actually dating, that will be it—but I could use some insight into why I keep doing this.*—S.G., San Francisco, California

A: Poor girl. Poor you. Poor everyone involved in this labyrinth of unrequited lust, misdirected affection and overabundant cocktails. Boredom is a genuine reason we do a lot of dumb shit, like drop molly alone on a Sunday afternoon or sign up to be a webcam model (speaking on behalf of a friend, of course). But it's not the only reason. I sense a measure of guilt and, yes, insecurity.

Admit it: You like the adoration. It's simultaneously safe and liberating to have sex with someone you have this kind of power over. And it's nice to have a woman on reserve, particularly when your self-esteem has taken a beating and you're a little horny. Even if you're not into the sex, you're getting off on the psychological elements in play. That, and you might have a smidge of a drinking problem. Are you drinking to make it easier to have sex with her, or are you having sex with her because you're drunk? Only you can answer that. Ask more questions while you're at it. Is it possible that deep down you think you don't deserve to be with someone you're attracted to? Are you afraid of experiencing the vulnerability that comes with actually caring? Traumatized from a previous relationship when you were the one who loved harder and got burned? Clearly you're not doing this out of some profound unconscious love for her, but it may have to do with an unconscious lack of love for yourself.

Q: *I'm going camping this summer with some friends, including a woman I've been flirting with for months. I think we'll finally do the deed, but I've never had sex outdoors before. Any tips?*—B.V., Ludington, Michigan

A: When it comes to sex in the wild, for every unfettered pleasure, there's a mosquito swarm, poison ivy bush or black bear cameo. The key is to embrace it all. Don't think of it as a war against nature but a union of romance and the great outdoors. Isn't the goal of camping to revel in the primal glory of living beyond civilization for a couple of days?

If you plan on keeping your escapades relegated to a tent, don't get busy on an air mattress; the sound of your bodies squeaking is a real mood killer. If you're more adventurous, sneak away to a remote area, pick her up like the almighty outdoorsman you are, ask her to wrap her legs around you, and go at it standing up. It's super hot, and you'll have minimal contact with leaves, soil and all the other stuff you don't want up your butt crack. That said, it's crucial that you get dirty, in every sense of the word. Good sex is worth a few bug bites, and wanting someone so bad you don't care about the repercussions can result in epic sex.

Questions? E-mail advisor@playboy.com.



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**PLAYBOY
INTERVIEW:**

KATHY GRIFFIN

A candid conversation with the comedian on surviving one of the most precipitous falls from grace in pop-culture history—and re-emerging funnier and angrier than ever

No matter your opinion of Kathy Griffin, this much holds true: Today she is one of the few people in our collective consciousness who is as beloved as she is despised. Ironically, it's a quality the 57-year-old comedian shares with her greatest adversary: President Donald Trump. The important distinction, of course, is that Kathy Griffin is not the leader of the free world.

Griffin—two-time Emmy winner and *New York Times* best-selling author, one of only three women to take home a Grammy for best comedy album for solo work, Guinness World Record-holder for “most stand-up specials by a comedian” and 2017's most unexpected enemy of the state—has few, if any, regrets. Absent from that list: her decision just over one year ago to share a photo of herself clutching a synthetic Trump head

slathered in ketchup. Captured in Griffin's \$10.5 million Bel Air mansion, the image triggered a rare instance of bipartisan condemnation across a nation severely bruised by 2016's tumultuous election. Somehow, in a time of widespread political discord, Americans agreed that Griffin's satire did not qualify as such and thus was unworthy of the First Amendment protections that have empowered and shielded American truth tellers from Lenny Bruce to Joan Rivers.

Citizens, pundits and celebrities on both sides, including her former friend Anderson Cooper and former first daughter Chelsea Clinton, joined the sitting president, then suffering one of the lowest approval ratings of his term thus far, in denouncing Griffin. The fallout included a canceled tour, an ouster from CNN, whose New Year's Eve special she

had co-hosted for 10 years, a spot on an Interpol watch list and a two-month Department of Justice investigation into whether the U.S. government should charge the comedian with conspiracy to assassinate the president. All this, despite the fact that Griffin captioned a tweet of the imagery with an antiviolence disclaimer and issued two public apologies immediately afterward—one in a Twitter video, in which she admitted the image was “disturbing,” and another during an ill-conceived press conference organized by former Harvey Weinstein lawyer Lisa Bloom.

After learning she had been exonerated by the Secret Service on July 27, 2017, 58 days after she released the photo, Griffin has had no choice but to adapt to a surreal and perilous new life. At the same time the Secret Service was investigating her, the Federal



“When people come up to me and say, ‘I’m so glad that whole Trump thing is over,’ I have to correct them and say, ‘I’m sorry. I don’t mean to be rude, but it’s not.’”



“Even my mom doesn’t take Fox News seriously anymore. It did take me about two hours to convince her I’m not ‘an ISIS,’ because she doesn’t like to wear her hearing aids.”



“One thing that bothers me is how the Milo Yiannopouloses of the world have coopted the term free speech. The march in Charlottesville? Not the free speech we’re talking about.”

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **AUSTIN HARGRAVE**



Bureau of Investigation stepped in as well, this time to ensure Griffin's safety from "credible threats." Death threats against Griffin, her then 97-year-old mother and her sister, Joyce, then hospitalized with terminal cancer, became commonplace. Talk shows refused to book her, and Hollywood's powerful ignored her e-mails. Griffin, whose career has fed off her ability to redraw the lines of political correctness and free speech, had become a pariah. Today, she estimates that the stunt has cost her as much as \$5 million in the past year. But her only regret since that fateful frame went live is having apologized at all.

Kathleen Mary Griffin was born on November 4, 1960 in the most typical of Midwest families of the Irish Catholic faith. She grew up in Chicago's middle-class suburbs with one sister and three brothers; their father, John, worked at a Radio Shack; mother Maggie worked as a cashier in a hospital. At the age of 18, Griffin moved to Los Angeles to pursue comedy, juggling jobs as a busser and a bank teller with classes at the Groundlings school. In 1996 she debuted on TV in her first notable role, on Brooke Shields's prime-time NBC sitcom, *Suddenly Susan*. Griffin continued to perform stand-up, increasingly basing her act on her real-life awkward encounters with celebrities, which landed her a string of hour-long comedy specials on Bravo and her own reality show, the Emmy-winning *My Life on the D-List*. In the past decade, Griffin's résumé has included stand-up (she has filmed more than 20 specials), albums (six, including the Grammy-winning *Kathy Griffin: Calm Down Gurrl*) and TV hosting jobs such as E!'s *Fashion Police* (where she replaced Rivers), an eponymous talk show and the Daytime Emmy Awards.

Last June, Griffin decided to heed the advice of Jim Carrey, who told her she had to harness the power that comes with being the most talked-about comic in the world; after all, Griffin ranked as the eighth most googled person on Earth last year. So she began writing her comeback. This has manifested as the Laugh Your Head Off tour, which, after cycling through an international run, is now warming up its North American leg. One of the tour's first stateside shows, at New York City's Carnegie Hall on June 26, reportedly sold out in one day.

In the midst of a changing tide in the

public's perception of Griffin, Playboy.com executive editor **Shane Michael Singh** spent an afternoon at her sprawling residence to find out why she's confident we'll buy what she's selling this time. Singh reports, "Griffin didn't hesitate in offering her bedroom, nestled in an upstairs corner of what she refers to as her 'fuck-you house,' as the location for a lengthy conversation about both her exile and her comeback. On her nightstand, a copy of Michael Wolff's *Fire and Fury*. On the television, MSNBC. And in her eyes, hope. As caustic as her comedy is—and as ferocious as she likes to appear when the camera blinks



red—the purported traitor is warm and well-spoken. Glimpses of her damaged ego reveal themselves briefly between long diatribes about First Amendment rights, sexism and the man she calls our 'accidental president.' Griffin is anything but weathered; she expressed her most human qualities, vacillating between humility, heartbreak and resilience—all while landing quip after impeccably timed quip.

"Griffin is eager to perform in America again because she believes that what happened to her can happen to any law-abiding citizen. Say what you will about the propriety of her comedy, but if patriotism remains

defined by one's love of the Constitution and the freedom to harness the soul's fire against the odds for a better tomorrow, few people are more patriotic than Kathy Griffin."

PLAYBOY: The Laugh Your Head Off tour has booked some of the country's most famous theaters, including Carnegie Hall, the Dolby Theatre and Radio City Music Hall. This follows an international leg across 15 countries and 23 cities. In the spring you booked your first stateside talk-show appearances since the controversy, on *Real Time With Bill Maher* and *The View*, and in

April you attended the White House Correspondents' Dinner in Washington, D.C. Are you feeling vindicated?

GRIFFIN: No—but I am feeling a change for the first time. America is taking its time "forgiving" me. Just last week a woman came up to me in a very fancy Santa Monica restaurant. She had wine sloshing and felt bold, I think, because she was with three friends. She came to my table and said, "Terrorist." So I don't feel totally vindicated, because I know this will be with me for the rest of my life. Every airport, every public setting—I never know who's going to come up and say something. There's still a feeling among the public that it's okay to do literally anything to me. If nothing else, one of the reasons this tour is important is that it's allowing me to go city to city and tell people they can hate the picture all they want. I have no problem with that. But I want everyone to know that if your 13-year-old kid takes that same picture and puts it on Twitter, he or she shouldn't be put under a two-month federal investigation.

PLAYBOY: Do you believe the investigation by the Department of Justice was unfounded? If a non-U.S. citizen fake-beheaded the president on social media, the DOJ would likely investigate.

GRIFFIN: Truly, I didn't think the photo would be a big deal. I thought it would be on the same level as when I said "Suck it, Jesus!" after my first Emmy win, which was the first time the industry got mad at me. But the trolls love to reprint the photo and pixelate the mask as though it's a real human head and then hashtag it #WeWillNeverForget. That was the banner of 9/11, you unoriginal fucks! I'm not Mohammed Atta. I'm not one



of the 9/11 hijackers. Calm the fuck down.

It's important that I defend the photo. We still live in a free society. What is arguably a piece of art—however you want to define that picture—shouldn't be subject to what, in my opinion, was an abuse of power by the White House and the Department of Justice. It was overreach. I've been doing stand-up so long that I've actually seen the change; we've now gone so far to the right that it's confusing for all of us. A lot of people have told me if I'd taken this photo post-Harvey Weinstein it would've been different. People forget that the photo came out three weeks after James Comey was fired. So the timing worked for Trump's team perfectly. I wasn't conscious of it; when you do a wacky photo shoot, even if you're making fun of the president, you don't check his schedule. You don't ask yourself, "How could this serve him?"

PLAYBOY: Are you suggesting the president had something to gain by denouncing you on Twitter?

GRIFFIN: The timing is obvious to me, but I'm obsessed with this stuff. I'm obsessed with the news. Trump knows how to keep the chaos going. For example, my little story was a big giant story and then it was forgotten by a lot of people. That's his stock-in-trade. You know, it's almost like the way he is with money. He gets it, then he loses it. He gets it, then he's in debt.

PLAYBOY: It should be said that you knew President Trump well before his presidential campaign.

GRIFFIN: I was on *The Apprentice* twice as part of the challenges. I'm going to be honest: I didn't hate Trump at that time. I just thought he was a kook. Trump absolutely loved it when I would give him shit at NBC events. He would show up for the opening of an envelope. Now people get mad at me. They're like, "Why didn't you know this about Trump?" First of all, I wasn't looking. I've had these Trump stories for 20 years, but nobody wanted to hear about Donald Trump back then. You get a bunch of gay guys and soccer moms together and they want to hear about *Real Housewives*. They want to hear about the Kardashians. They want to hear about my mom. So to be able to resurrect these stories is honestly a fucking wet dream. One of the two stories in the show—besides my personal experience—involves Joan Rivers the day she called me to be on an *Apprentice* challenge. Of course I would do anything for Joan, so I spent the day with the Donald and his "lover" Ivanka, listening to those two fucking airheads. Talk about dumb and dumber.

PLAYBOY: Did you feel any compassion for Barron or Melania Trump following the stunt?

GRIFFIN: I think Barron has seen far worse,

especially since the photo. Now that we've heard Karen McDougal talk about Trump walking her past Melania's closed door, saying she's having her quiet time, when she reads? Like, okay.

PLAYBOY: You've retracted both of your public apologies. Do you want the country's forgiveness?

GRIFFIN: It's not that I want forgiveness; it's that I've recognized there are folks, primarily white women, who believe Fox News. They think they have to forgive me—and they think I care. The truth is, my whole brand is about not giving a fuck. I'm the mayor of zero fucks, and that's what bought this house, cash outright. Obviously, I'm learning a lot. One of the things I'm open about is I understand that I absolutely have white privilege. Yes, I have earned every single penny myself, but if I had not been in my position when

A lot of people have told me if I'd taken this photo post-Harvey Weinstein it would've been different.

this happened—if I was still a bank teller or a busser—I don't know how I could have recovered. I certainly think of myself when I was a young comic pulling a restaurant job five days a week. A stunt like this would have absolutely ended my career. That's another reason I'm on a mission, aside from trying to make everybody laugh. I do want to be funny first, no matter what, but this is different. That's what I keep saying to people about this particular administration: It's just different. We can't be having these conversations in the way we had them before. I was not a George W. Bush fan, but it was nothing like this during W.'s presidency. During W. you could still make jokes about the president.

PLAYBOY: Why did now feel like the right time to tour again in the States, where you're still receiving death threats?

GRIFFIN: You know, I talked to other people who'd been in scandals, trying to negotiate how much time I would need. Sharon Stone

said, "You've got to leave the country for eight years." I said, "You first." I think Paul Reubens told me five years. Then I was like, "Wait a minute!" What I'm finding in this experience is if you give people a minute—and I'm happy to indulge all questions—I can usually explain it. I'm trying to explain what happened to me in such a way that people can put themselves in my shoes and say, "You know, she might be annoying, but this is not right. I don't think I'd like it if this happened to my mom, or my aunt, or my sister, or my cousin or my kid." Having lived through it, I feel I'm on a comedy mission to tell people that we need to talk about this.

Ninety percent of the *Laugh Your Head Off* show is going to be ridiculous jokes and hopefully laugh-out-loud stories. But I take a couple of five- or 10-minute breaks where I get real, which I've never done before in an act.

I tried it the first night in Auckland, and if it hadn't worked, I wouldn't have done it again. Then I tried it the second night at the Sydney Opera House, and I found it to be the part of the show people remembered the most. Typically, that's not my thing. I shouldn't stop and take a serious moment. But because it's real, because everybody's watching this stuff, I thought, Okay, I'll let people in. And I'm selling tickets now.

PLAYBOY: Even so, you're still banned by some theaters, right?

GRIFFIN: This is the fight back. My own representatives, who I love dearly and who are all middle-aged white men, didn't think I could sell a ticket. Originally, after going overseas, I was like, "Let me take some time. Let me see how it feels." We're now in

a world so divided that I understand I have to reach out to the people who have strong feelings about me, my comedy, my body of work, or people who just come to get the story. There are those people who come because, in a way, buying a ticket is their way of resisting. Whatever gets them there, as long as I make them laugh, that's fine. But Carnegie Hall is a big deal because they kept saying no. Now I'm going after my audience because I know I have to. I can't just go to friendly cities. It has been a knock-down, drag-out fight—fights I've been having with these guys my whole career. One of the many reasons they all think I'm an intolerable bitch is because I get on the phone and scream and say I'm not stopping. I said, "I'm going to play the Kennedy Center," and they said no. I said, "Well, I'm going to announce it on Bill Maher, so you'd better figure it out." And the Kennedy Center said no. The four times I played there before, I actually played as a guest, which means



the rent was much lower. Now I have to pay \$75,000 rent. You watch me sell it out.

I'll tell you right now, the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood initially said no. They finally said yes when they saw those tickets coming in. Radio City was the fucking battle royale. After I kick the bucket, I want some baby gay or young female comedian or young person of color who has a dream to say, "This bitch did it at 57! She did Radio City and Carnegie in one fucking week."

PLAYBOY: What could have changed the tide faster in your favor?

GRIFFIN: The show runners could have, with the flick of a switch. I'm not friends with Lorne Michaels. I don't think he's a fan of mine. Maybe he is, I don't know. But let's cut the shit: If he had put me in one sketch on last season's *Saturday Night Live* opener, it would have changed everything. I truly didn't predict it would take this long. When I finally was on Comedy Central's *The President Show*, I was practically crying. No one was trying to threaten me. [Creator and star] Tony Atamanuik is so talented and collaborative. I told him, "Tony, you're the one who lifted a finger." It's not that I didn't get support: Judd Apatow tweeted positive things; the same with Adam McKay. I respect Adam tremendously; he's a fucking genius filmmaker. He was being very supportive, e-mailing me, "Man, what's happened to you is fucked-up. It's abuse of power. It's not what this country's about." On the fourth or fifth e-mail, I wrote him a bitchy note back: "If only you knew someone who was maybe in the film or television industry who could give me 10."

So yeah, I got down in the mud. I was begging. I was pleading. I was hinting. The message I got very clearly was to get back to basics, honey. For some of the gigs I did overseas I was literally handing out flyers. My boyfriend and I would just do it for fun. We would be walking around Amsterdam; people are having delicious homemade sweets, and we're looking for a Kinkos. I would have walked a fucking sandwich board. I still have that whatever-it-takes mentality. I'm happy to admit I've failed many times.

PLAYBOY: You're referencing, I assume, the press conference you held with Lisa Bloom three days after you released the photo.

GRIFFIN: It exacerbated things. Cindi Berger, the famous publicist, was calling and screaming at me, and she wasn't even my publicist anymore. I'm in the middle of a shit storm and she's screaming at me to do an apology tape. So I put out that apology tape, which turned on me. Lisa Bloom was the only

one who called, and that whole thing was a disaster, so fuck her and the horse she flew in on. She's awful. She was representing Harvey Weinstein at the same time and didn't bother to mention that.

PLAYBOY: You didn't know?

GRIFFIN: The right wing likes to attack me. They're like, "You knew about Weinstein." I met Harvey Weinstein one time, sitting next to him at a roast for Quentin Tarantino. That's it. I don't have his cell number, you know? That's how crazy the wall of shit gets. It's not just "You said something that offends me and here's why." It's got tentacles that reach out: "You're in the Weinstein Hollywood crowd." I'm like, "Um, no."

PLAYBOY: What's your relationship with the First Amendment? Does the country need a refresher on it?

GRIFFIN: It's the amendment I know the

I found out last week that I'm on another kill list. At this point I'm just like, Oh, again?

best, that's for sure. It's how I make my living. It's how you make your living. One thing that bothers me is how the Milo Yiannopouloses and Ann Coulters of the world have coopted the term *free speech*. The march in Charlottesville? Not the free speech we're talking about. A woman was murdered by a Dodge Challenger driven by a guy named James Alex Fields Jr., and Jason Kessler organized the rally. I think about that woman's family all the time. Not only were other people seriously injured that day, but Heather Heyer was brutally mowed down. Then it became about the marchers' right to assemble, and then it became funny because they had tiki torches. I'm like, Heather Heyer is dead for a truly peaceful protest.

PLAYBOY: Is the alt-right's definition of free speech different from the rest of the country's?

GRIFFIN: I had no idea about the Nazi YouTube channels. How are young people even exposed to people like this? When I was that

age, that kind of verbiage, or even that kind of thought, was something we laughed at. It was what the older aunts and uncles said, and we'd all be like, "Yeah, whatever." That is what surprises me. Who the fuck thinks a guy as young as Milo Yiannopoulos is the face of free speech? And what's going to happen to all the ladies who were giving me a standing ovation in Kentucky three years ago? I don't know where they stand. I don't know where they stand with the country, and I don't know where I stand with them.

PLAYBOY: What was the most invasive question the Secret Service asked you during its investigation?

GRIFFIN: They said they were tapping my phones. I couldn't prove it, but of course I had to turn that into a joke on day one. I was having dinner downstairs with Kris Jenner, Rita Wilson and Melanie Griffith, and I'm like,

"All right, if anyone's listening, we're starting dessert! Not looking to hurt anybody!" Until I was exonerated, it became this thing where I'd tell anybody who came over that they might be surveilled. And not one person cared. It's interesting; I was proud of myself when they raided Paul Manafort's home—I was like, I know exactly how this works. The feds would call my lawyers every single day and say, "You know, we could do a house call 24/7." I was determined not to have that happen, because I was fearful they might try to drum up a charge. The feeling of having the country so against me—I thought, Kathy could go bye-bye real fast and nobody would give a shit. They would think I had it coming.

PLAYBOY: Your mother, Maggie, has been a hallmark of your stand-up for more than a decade and was ever-present on your reality show. How has your relationship with her changed in the past year?

GRIFFIN: The good news is that even my mom doesn't take Fox News seriously anymore. It did take me about two hours to convince her I'm not "an ISIS," because she doesn't like to wear her hearing aids; she feels they're not flattering. So that moment of having to explain to your 97-year-old alcoholic mother, who's watching Fox News with the sound off and seeing pictures of me—I don't know what she saw or heard, but my favorite line of hers was "Well, I was watching Fox News, and do you know not one of those guys had your back?" I go, "Mom, let's break it down. First of all, *guys*." We joke about it now. I'm happy to commit voter fraud with my mom and just dangle the chad for her, because she can't be trusted at this point.

PLAYBOY: Do you think her decision to still watch Fox News, despite personal knowledge





that it can range from slightly biased to outright incorrect, represents this country's generational divide?

GRIFFIN: My mom gets a pass because she's so old, but that wasn't the Maggie Griffin, or any other Griffin, I grew up with. We're from Chicago. We were considered middle class. My mom always worked, even after she had kids. My dad worked 60 hours a week in a retail store. Our dinner-table discussions were always political conversations about what alderman was on the take and who was on the front page of the *Tribune*.

I don't know if you remember the Nazis marching in Skokie, Illinois, but that was the biggest story in Chicagoland for 10 years. We argued about it at our dinner table a million times. As Griffins and as Irish Democrats we agreed they had the right to march, but it's offensive, so you have the right to stand on the curb and yell at them. I don't really know why my mom has become the way she is. I have theories, but sometimes I honestly think it's because Fox News has bright colors and the ladies look like the *Real Housewives*. Maybe my mom finds that comforting. Also, they project. They're the loudest channel because they know Maggie's listening, so a lot of their broadcasts are shouting. She likes that too.

PLAYBOY: One of the first moments you realized the photo was a mistake was when Rosie O'Donnell phoned you and asked whether you had considered how the image might affect the mother of Daniel Pearl, the American Israeli journalist whom terrorists beheaded in 2002. Did you ever call Pearl's family to apologize?

GRIFFIN: Oh gosh, no. Number one, the last person they probably want to hear from is an obnoxious comedian. And as much as I love to be an activist in my own way, that would be very much out of my lane. What was interesting about that was having performed for the troops in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Uzbekistan—all gone. I really do try to walk the line. I've come under criticism my whole career because I do an atypical type of stand-up. I do stories more than jokes. Also, I'm a woman, and I'm not an attractive woman. I don't talk with a baby voice. I don't have a big studio behind me. I've performed at Walter

Reed hospital and all this other stuff, and it's nothing but a win for the person performing. To perform in a war zone for the troops is different. That's something I struggle with all the time: the Ellens of the world who think I'm classless. Yeah, but you could maybe give me a little credit for performing in war zones. Or not. Okay, I guess not.

PLAYBOY: In the midst of dealing with the Department of Justice, you were also fired by CNN, and your tour was canceled in every city. As this played out, your sister, Joyce, was in

That's one thing I have a lot of practice in. After all these years, there have been many times when I've had an eight P.M. show and gotten some bad news in my life at 7:40 P.M. I'll be crying, and then I flip the switch. During this experience I've had to do a lot of flipping the switch. When you're facing somebody in the hospital with cancer, it's quite easy to put everything aside. You talk about perspective: Okay, really, my little problem? One thing that made those worlds intersect, which was painful, was that my sister got death threats in the hospital.

PLAYBOY: What has been the extent of the death threats?

GRIFFIN: I found out last week that I'm on another kill list. I can't say the agency, but it's a federal agency, and they contacted my lawyer and told him there's a kill list of 40. I'm on it and they want to make me aware. At this point I'm just like, Oh, again?

The fact that this stuff is happening to a comedian? It doesn't matter if you like me or my comedy; you shouldn't want this to be happening in your country. These folks don't play. When I started getting stuff delivered to the house, at first I thought, Okay, you can google where celebrities live, but at least I'm safe. Nobody can get in. But then you get into the category of what to reveal to family members and when. And what do they want to know, and when am I forcing too much on them at a time when they're dealing with something much more real? At the same time that two federal agencies were investigating me, my lawyer was negotiating the situation with the FBI, which keeps us abreast

of what they call "credible threats." And those are still coming in. But fear is one of those things you just deal with, you know? I know this shouldn't make me laugh, but I'm now laughing at the most twisted shit, because the situation is so crazy and continues to get crazier. When people come up to me and say, "I'm so glad that whole Trump thing is over," I have to correct them and say, "I'm sorry. I don't mean to be rude, but it's not."

PLAYBOY: In the past year, did you ever find yourself leaning on your Catholic faith?

GRIFFIN: Oh, no. I'm a fallen Catholic who fell so hard I woke up in Beijing. But many times I would just walk around being like,



the hospital, battling terminal cancer, a fight she lost in September. How did you comfort her while dealing with your own crises?

GRIFFIN: You compartmentalize like a motherfucker. Just so everyone knows, Joyce was the focus. I knew if I was going to see my mom or my sister or my brother, that we would talk about my situation for 30 seconds. Then it was pretty much off the table—though my sister would pipe up every so often and be like, "You know, this is bullshit." And until her dying day, she had a pussy hat on. She was gay, and she was a schoolteacher when you couldn't be out. So she's got a great story herself.



All right, higher power or whatever you want to be called, if you exist, help. I'm not a religious person—which, by the way, has become anathema. There was a time when you could stand onstage at any comedy club and say, "I'm an atheist. Here are some jokes about it." Now Americans are so fucking freaked out about that.

PLAYBOY: In July 1972 Jane Fonda famously visited North Vietnam, where she was photographed with an anti-aircraft gun. That photo, which earned her the nickname Hanoi Jane, sparked outrage across the country, and Fonda still has to apologize for it four decades later. Do you identify with her?

GRIFFIN: Yes. I reached out to her many times. I would have times during this period when I was up and down. Sometimes I just wanted to focus on something else. I did a ton of writing, and every so often I would shoot out an e-mail. I wrote Fonda, "Where the fuck have you been?" It was so funny. I sent one to Gloria Steinem too. I love Gloria—we're not besties, but we're friends and I respect her tremendously. I grew up wanting to be her. I met her when I turned 50 and cold-called her to take her to dinner. It was the greatest 50th birthday I could ever have wanted. I thought, I hope I know Steinem well enough to do this. I just wrote, "Hey, it's Kathy Griffin. Where the fuck have you been?" She immediately called me back, saying "I've been thinking about you," and blah, blah, blah. She was one of the first people I told, "I need you to say something publicly." She was like, "I thought you were covered by your comedy friends and your Hollywood friends."

PLAYBOY: Why do you think you deserve the support of celebrities when so much of your success has been based on mocking them?

GRIFFIN: Because those same celebrities know that when the chips are down—and when they have been down—I am absolutely there for them. It was painful when certain people I was happy to take calls from during bad times didn't feel the same way. And it was harder when I would reach out and say, "I need you," and some people were just not having it. Most people avoided me. Al Franken literally called me that day and said, "I can't be associated with you." And I was hosting two book events for him for nothing. I've had fund-raisers for him at this home. I thought I was being nice and being a good Democrat.

PLAYBOY: Along with O'Donnell and Carrey, Aubrey Plaza, Jimmy Kimmel and Katt Williams are some of the few public people who offered you support or advice. As you've

said, in addition to celebrity friends, many people on the management side of your career denounced or ignored you. Whose support or abandonment surprised you the most?

GRIFFIN: Well, obviously Anderson Cooper, because I really thought we were solid. Everybody knows that feeling of "Oh no, not that guy." I don't have a funny spin on it, because it's part of CNN firing me. A lot of people know me only from the CNN New Year's Eve special. I got my second book deal because of that show. I wouldn't wish having one's entire body of work erased overnight on my worst enemy.

PLAYBOY: Would you be open to mending things with him at this point?

GRIFFIN: I don't think it's me who has to do the mending. That's how I feel. Remember, this is a guy who let five months pass before he texted me.

What's going to happen to all the ladies who were giving me a standing ovation in Kentucky three years ago?

PLAYBOY: So he did finally reach out to you.

GRIFFIN: Yeah, and it was a bitchy text. He was like, "Well, I guess you're mad at me," and, "After I've defended you for years...." That's another thing: If I hear one more person say "I've defended you." You know what? Clean your own side of the fucking street. "I've defended you" implies they've had to defend me. It's such a backhanded compliment. "I've defended you." I wouldn't say it to my cousin.

PLAYBOY: If she were alive today, what do you think Joan Rivers would have said about all this?

GRIFFIN: You're not going to believe this shit—and I'm going to try not to cry—but Joan told me at our final dinner, "Don't make an enemy of Trump. Don't ever go up against Donald." But Joan and I were politically diametrically opposed. She was Republican; I'm a Democrat. Who cares? I loved her and respected her and hung on her every word. And she was as dreamy as you would imagine. If

you recall, there was a long time when she was viewed as the most evil bitch in the world—"How can you even like her? She's mean." I would talk to Don Rickles about it. Believe it or not, Rickles, until the day he died, said, "Honey, I hate when they call me an insult comic." I watched how Joan was vilified. Luckily, in the end she got the respect she deserved.

PLAYBOY: The profiles of many comedians, especially television hosts including Jimmy Kimmel, Stephen Colbert and Samantha Bee, have soared due to their criticism of Trump. Jimmy Fallon, however, has been faulted for not taking a harder stance against the Trump administration on *The Tonight Show*. Do you hold any bitterness toward comics who have played it safe?

GRIFFIN: Yeah, I think that's bullshit. I'm sorry. I think comics who don't talk about Trump—it's like the old Michael Jordan. Michael Jordan, you have enough money now; it's time you have a LeBron moment and do something important. I really think it's the responsibility of a comedian to push the envelope. On the other hand, I respect all kinds of comics. I'm just saying, in this day and age, it's different. Chelsea Handler is not a big fan of mine, but I don't care. It's not about that. When Chelsea achieves something, it's a fucking benchmark. I really admire her. You know what she's doing now? She's fucking dropped out and doing real activism. She's going Alyssa Milano style, town to town. And she's a different person. I loved her on *Girls Behaving Badly*, and I loved her E! show. And trust me, I wish I would have had the opportunity to

get the support of a network and all that other stuff I've yet to experience.

PLAYBOY: On the topic of women supporting women, you've said you haven't felt welcomed by the #MeToo and Time's Up movements. Why?

GRIFFIN: I have no issues with #MeToo and Time's Up. I think they're both amazing. Keep going. But I have to admit I'm a little bitchy and insulted, because they haven't really reached out to me or embraced me in any way. Sharon Stone did a great interview on *CBS Sunday Morning*, I think, where the interviewer asked about #MeToo, and she just laughed. I thought, Yeah, she's not comfortable. I can tell you I've talked to many other actresses of a certain age. You would know their names, and if you start to ask yourself, "I wonder why this person hasn't come forward?" I think there's a reason Sharon just laughed. I think she's still scared. And that used to be unimaginable to me. Prior to this experience happening to me, I would have thought that



Sharon Stone was fucking untouchable, that if Sharon Stone wanted to talk shit about any politician of any party, she just could. And I watched it and thought, She can't. She can't.

PLAYBOY: So you don't think #MeToo and Time's Up will effect real change for women?

GRIFFIN: Time's not up. I'm chairman of the Time's Not Up Yet campaign. I'm just saying, ladies, gays, people of color—time's not up. Time's Up is a cute slogan, but sorry, the new day on the horizon is not tomorrow. I'm trying to manage expectations as someone who has lived through it. And let me be clear: I don't think this is entertainment-focused at all. When I worked at Polly's Pies, it happened there. When I worked at a bank, it happened there. It happens everywhere, and it happens more outside the entertainment industry, because there's no spotlight. But in the middle of #MeToo and Trump and Time's Up, Tony Robbins is in a fucking stadium [during a March 2018 seminar in San Jose, California], physically pushing a woman, when, I assume, she's been closely tied to #MeToo and all that that implies. That's the sort of thing that makes me think our work here is not done. I kind of thought it was funny at the time, but he's saying that he's sticking up for his poor CEOs, who can barely hire a gorgeous woman now. And the way he keeps turning to the crowd, like "Am I right?" And then the lemmings are in the middle. I would be on my feet. I would be in jail. I'm not strong, but I'd take him out at the knees.

PLAYBOY: But many men, such as Matt Lauer and Billy Bush, have lost their careers.

GRIFFIN: Billy Bush got a \$9 million severance package when he had to be fired from *Today*. Also, he's a middle-aged white guy. He'll probably be back and be fine. By the way, Billy Bush did send me a card, and I read it live in the show. I call it accidentally hilarious.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about a different man. Randy Bick, your boyfriend since 2011, is almost two decades younger than you. He's also your tour manager. What's different about dating a younger man?

GRIFFIN: One of the reasons Randy and I get along is because, being 18 years my junior, he didn't grow up in the same sexist environment I did. He didn't come to the table thinking women weren't equal. I understand why so many younger people can't fathom that time, but I'm happy to tell them about it, because we may be on the brink of it again. We also work well together because we have our work relationship and our romantic relationship. He's a mellow, calm, smart guy, and that's what I like, because I'm a high-strung motherfucker.

PLAYBOY: What happens on November 3, 2020? Oprah Winfrey has confirmed that she won't run, but is she still the Democrats' best hope, mere months before a strong candidate needs to emerge?

GRIFFIN: Compared to Trump? Hell yeah. One of my dreams is to have Trump name state capitals. See if he even knows basic state capitals. I'm convinced he doesn't know where he's bombing. I'm convinced he knows nothing about the geography of Syria. I don't think he can name five cities in Syria. He hasn't been to Afghanistan, Iran or Iraq, which is unbelievable because he's the most militaristic person ever. Why don't you go there if you're so militaristic?

As much as I love to make fun of Oprah, in this environment I don't see how she wouldn't come out of it just eviscerated. I fear they would spread so much false information about

***I'm chairman of
the Time's Not Up
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Time's Up is a
cute slogan, but
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not tomorrow.***

her, and people would believe it. If the question was whether she could start in five minutes, I'd say absolutely. But it wouldn't be good for her. Can you imagine the shit they would make up? If Hillary's killing children in a pizza parlor, imagine what they want to do to Oprah. They freaked out with a black man. A black woman? They're going to fucking lose their shit. They're going to start sending missiles to countries they can't name.

PLAYBOY: So how does this chapter of your life end? Or is this only the beginning?

GRIFFIN: I've got to take whatever gigs come my way. I'm proud that I've built my whole career. I'm my mother's daughter. My dad was the same way: Be professional. Be on time. Know your material. As a comic, I've done more televised specials than anyone. I wanted to be in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as an inspiration to younger folks. To have that stuff go away overnight.... I don't know if I can get it back. One of my dreams is, at this

age and at this level, typically most comedians have done one seminal film role. Robin Williams was in *Good Will Hunting*. Alan Arkin won an Academy Award for *Little Miss Sunshine*, and he was in Second City prior to that. George Carlin would show up in movies. There's a real history there. That's one dream. I'm definitely still hopeful. But do you know what my real dream is? I would love to do a speaking tour.

PLAYBOY: Like a college speaking tour?

GRIFFIN: Yes, because I have decades of straight-up experience about a lot of shit. I'm certainly not from a famous family or a wealthy family, but I'm happy to share any and all of it. I'm so grateful when folks share it with me, not just Joan and Don but anybody. Aubrey Plaza's younger than me, and the stories she shares are so important. When I talk about supporting women and gays, it's like the women have gotten knocked out. It's one of the reasons I'm a fan of Suze Orman. She has helped me tremendously with financial advice. She's never steered me wrong. Her premise is that women have to start talking about money honestly and not lying and acting like they get paid more.

One thing that's frustrating to me: When are people going to connect the dots, just as citizens? The idea that local small-time newspapers are going away? I want to reach out to people and say, "Please fight for this." I try to follow as much broad news as possible. People don't understand how it affects them until it affects them. I feel this is my responsibility. I would love to sit down in schools of any kind with a First Amendment professor or the women's studies department and talk to them about anything, from my case to previous experiences. Because when I do talk to younger women and tell them about my experiences when I was their age—I think I did my first commercial when I was 17—younger folks in the industry sometimes think I'm making it up.

I'm all for aspiration. I am a capitalist, but you've got to put the work in. And you should enjoy doing it. It shouldn't be "Ugh, I have to work." It should be "I'm going to find something I like to do, and I'm going to do it to the best of my ability." What I'm benefiting from, and what I'm really enjoying, is the fact that people have stopped this bullshit about staying in your lane. Everyone understands it's all mixed now. We have a pop culture president. This is something that personally happened to me. It's historic. It's unprecedented in the history of the United States. My act has always been about what's going on, and now I really, really have a story to tell. ■

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SUN SONG

*The heat is on when awe-inspiring Aussie **Sarah Stephens** soaks up some rays with her favorite records (and one very lucky bulldog)*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CAMERON HAMMOND**





















"What you call bad sex, I call physical comedy."



A white rabbit with long ears and a small red nose is dressed in a formal red tuxedo with a black bow tie. The rabbit is holding a vintage-style microphone in its right hand and a thin black cane in its left hand. The background is a solid, vibrant red.

PLAYBOY'S SUMMER *Comedy* SPOTLIGHT

Join us and more than a dozen of our favorite comics as we look at politics and platforms, sex and science, through the lens of laughter



Welcome to My Mind

by Hannibal Buress

The actor and comedian offers a tantalizing glimpse of his creative process, with the help of a bad joint and a wayward tentacle

I have this bit.

I don't even know if it's actually.... No, it's definitely not comedy.

It's just a weird piece where I talk about somebody I knew in Nashville who was coming to my show. I jokingly said, "Hey, bring some weed! I'll give you some tickets." I really didn't care if she brought weed or not, but she brought a joint, and I'm like, "Thank you." I get back to the Airbnb and I'm looking at the joint, and it looks super brown. And then I break down the joint and it's mostly tobacco. She gave me a spliff.

Now, that's weird, rude, inconsiderate, *dishonest*. I don't smoke cigarettes. You can't give somebody a surprise cigarette, you know what I mean? And it wasn't even a good ratio of tobacco to weed. I felt a little offended and weirded out by it, so I hit her up. "Are you serious? You been hanging out with people from England? What is this shit?"

I tried to figure out a way to talk about that onstage. We have a projector, so I put up a picture of the contents of that garbage joint: "Look at this shit!" It was not really that moving, just kind of like, "Okay." I thought to myself, This bit is not that good. It's not really a comedy bit; it's just me complaining.

I decided to channel the audience's disinterest—"You guys don't like this bit because it's disgusting. *That's* why you're quiet about it." And then I was sitting at an Airbnb in between shows and I said, "What if I was like, 'Would you rather see this or...pregnant porn?'" And then I was like, "Okay, what if we actually put on pregnant porn and kept switching between the pregnant porn and the picture of the spliff?" And then somehow pregnant porn turned into tentacle porn.

And so onstage we cue up the tentacle porn. I say, "Hey, look at this terrible spliff. Oh, you guys are silent because you're horrified. What's

worse, this or tentacle porn?" And we play a quick clip of tentacle porn, and then I do it how eye doctors do it: "Number one," and it's the spliff; "Number two," tentacle porn. I do that for a couple of minutes.

It's not really stand-up, but it's fun to do.

But then I got a message from this girl: "What was that that you showed? I've never seen—" And then she's like, "How do I find that?" I said, "Just go to TubeGalore. They have a tentacle-porn section." Later she wrote me, "That was the weirdest, *hottest* thing I've ever seen!" So I took a risk and changed one life. With tentacle porn.

If you asked me at 19, when I started, if I'd be 35 and introducing strangers that paid to see me do tentacle porn, I'd probably say, "That's a weird thing to say about me 16 years from now." I'd probably kick you out of my house or wherever we were. I would say, "First of all, what is tentacle porn? And leave my home." ■

OPPOSITE PAGE: MR. PLAYBOY BY CHLOÉ FLEURY THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSE LIROLA

From left: Felix Biederman, Will Menaker, Matt Christman, Amber A'Lee Frost and Virgil Texas.



Laughter in the Dark

Having survived the 2016 election, the far-left podcast **Chapo Trap House** doubles down on its radical satire. If you're not laughing, you're not paying attention

The Brooklyn apartment that serves as home base for the political-satire podcast *Chapo Trap House* feels more like a dorm room than a recording studio. Graphic novels line the walls, attended by a drinking bird, and the coffee table is covered in mike cords, cups and rolling papers.

BY **BRIAN HEATER**

Around that table sit hosts Felix Biederman, Will Menaker, Matt Christman, Amber A'Lee Frost and Virgil Texas. Producer Chris Wade sprawls on a beanbag, searching for enough microphones to cover the co-hosts and a guest who has yet to arrive. The episode they're about to tape will be beamed to 25,000 Grey Wolves, the show's loyal listeners, named ironically and

somewhat arcanelly for a Turkish ultranationalist movement.

Recording hasn't started, but the crew is already bantering about John McAfee, Prince and Eva Braun. It's Earth Day and one of the first truly nice days of the year. There's a fleeting mention of how beautiful it is outside. Everyone agrees, and then it's back to examining Kanye's most recent run of crazy tweets. When recording begins, there's very little change in the tenor of the room.

In its purest form, podcasting is a casual conversation recorded for posterity, and few shows capture that magic in a bottle as well as *Chapo Trap House*. As Menaker puts it, "The social atomization that has been created by

the current conditions means that we have now created a new type of artist—basically 'professional friend.'" To the podcast's following, which has only grown since the election, this friend moonlights as both therapist and, amid the laughs, sibling who calls you on your shit.

...

The show that began in March 2016 as an exchange between three Twitter friends—and that libertarian magazine *Reason* once called "a group therapy session for Bernie bros"—was founded for those among the left who feel their ideals aren't addressed by either the political system or the mainstream media. It came together during a brief moment when it seemed Sanders might succeed in disrupting the DNC.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS SHONTING



"There was basically no media saying to people who were backing Sanders in that primary, 'You're not crazy; this is *all* crazy,'" Christman says. "Every other piece of established media, even the most liberal stuff you could get in a mainstream context, was telling you that Bernie was crazy, his followers were a bunch of dumb-ass college students and harassing monsters, and Hillary was the progressive choice."

Of course, things didn't work out too well for either Democrat. As for *Chapo*, the night Trump won, the show's hosts assumed it was done for. "We thought we'd be lost in the liberal blob that was going to be resistance to Trump," says Brendan James, the show's former producer. "We thought subscribers would just go stagnant and we'd get bored. Instead, subscriptions shot up after Trump won. And then after the inauguration they shot up again."

Two years after its first episode, *Chapo* stands as one of the premier progressive podcasts, offering a jarringly funny alternative to mainstream political comedy. It regularly delves into such life-and-death topics as North Korea and America's broken health care system, but rarely does it take itself too seriously—and when it does, there's invariably a *Simpsons* reference or a Muppet-esque impression of a right-wing commentator just around the bend. In an age of social-media and cable-news overload, the show navigates political minutiae without feeling like social-studies homework. It's a coping mechanism for a world gone mad.

Today, loyal Grey Wolves fund the show to the tune of around \$99,000 a month on Patreon. In August, team Chapo will spawn its first book, *The Chapo Guide to Revolution*. A satirical take on *A People's History of the United States*, the book skewers everything from fascist regimes to Aaron Sorkin. "It's Howard Zinn meets Howard Stern," Texas deadpans, sending the room into hysterics. ("Oh my God," Christman says, "that gave me leukemia.")

As this episode, "Comey the Clown," kicks off, Texas launches into an over-the-top Bernie Sanders impression: "I want to thank the men for having me here today, thank the women for their reverent silence and thank the people of color for not being visible. Except for you, of course, [Cornel] West." It's

irony folded into irony, and Texas's co-hosts can't contain their laughter.

...

"We're actually pretty rarely educational, and usually only by accident," says Frost. "Media people think they're changing the world by writing their fucking *Medium* post about how Trump is bad. That takes real political mobilization, and we want to be very clear that's not what we're doing."

The show's hosts are modest to a fault in describing their mission, but at its best, *Chapo* is a biweekly reminder that there's a world of progressive politics to the left of the Democratic Party—a world where labor unions are king and casting a vote means more than simply choosing between the lesser of two evils. At a time when late-night comedy is mostly content to focus on jabs at the commander-in-chief's skin tone, *Chapo*'s long-form, freewheeling conversations attempt to make some sense of the utter insanity of contemporary politics. Over time it might

even provide the pop-culture analog to the last Democratic presidential primary, which saw a deep-left candidate draw his decidedly more entrenched rival a few steps away from the center.

So how does *Chapo* stack up against that other, vastly more established font of political satire?

"After decades of

The Daily Show, which at one point was really punchy and good but is now garbage, obviously you're leaving so much out on the table that you're only going to be left with hack jokes," says Menaker. "People may not think we do it the best, but we're trying to tap into a whole other sort of undervalued side of ways to make jokes."

"If you can't go further left than that," Christman adds, "it's you and 500 other shows trying to make the same four jokes, because that's how much joke territory you've allowed yourself."

Chapo has become a rallying point for loyal listeners who have felt disenfranchised and downright terrified by the two-party system and the rise of Trumpism. But among the show's rapid-fire references and heaps of sarcasm, there's a genuine sense that all is not lost. Dare we call it hope?

"Obviously it's hard to be optimistic about the future of the United States in a kind of broad, giant sense," says Menaker. "But I'm constantly made to feel hopeful by people who say, 'I thought I was crazy until I listened to you.'" ■

"IT'S HOWARD ZINN MEETS HOWARD STERN."

THE QUOTABLE CHAPO

Wit and wisdom from the podcast and Grey Wolf feed

"I do appreciate that all these Clinton people have one-syllable names that sound like you're taking a shit."

—Matt Christman, 10/12/16

"The tax bill is kind of like the biggest Make-A-Wish ever. It's for every inbred failson of people who invented new types of missiles and more efficient ways of dumping pollutants in rivers. Please, you don't understand. My son is very sick. He's incredibly stupid and shitty, and he can't do anything. I can't pay any taxes. I need to give my son his dream of making a shirt that somehow makes him look fatter."*

—Felix Biederman, 12/20/17

"We're in a weird place now where genetic screening is able to tell earlier and earlier if your fetus will become a National Review columnist, and we're in danger of losing them. All of them."

—Will Menaker, 3/9/18

"The most period-accurate thing [at a recent Renaissance Faire] was a recreation of a Viking settlement.... This very, very soft-spoken man explained a little bit about Viking history and how they did the battles, and all I could think in the back of my head is that I really hope this sweet, pleasant old man is not a gigantic Nazi."

—Virgil Texas, 9/5/17

"When Mueller comes it's like clapping two chalkboard erasers together."

—Will Menaker, 12/20/17

*Failson: the consequence-immune offspring of generational wealth (see: Wyatt Ingraham Koch, Donald Trump Jr., et al.)



POD PERSON

Let the wildly prolific **Paul F. Tompkins** be your guide to the comedy-podcast firmament

BY **TIM DONNELLY**

From *Mr. Show* to *BoJack Horseman*, Paul F. Tompkins has staked his claim on some of modern comedy's most cult-adored outposts—but the core of his devoted following undoubtedly comes from his work in podcasts. Delve into his appearances as guest, host or character, and it's a safe bet you'll become that one headphoned maniacally laughing commuter on the bus.

A Reddit database tracks more than 1,100 Tompkins podcast appearances, and fans have flooded the internet with artwork depicting his characters. His secret? He's just like you: "If you're outside Los Angeles, if you're getting into comedy, you can listen to these things and think, Okay, there are people out there who share a sensibility with me. That means there's a place for me in this arena; there's a place for me in this world."

HOST

SPONTANEANATION

Tompkins fully embraced long-form improv when he launched this show in 2015. The centerpiece is a three-button board that improvisers can smash to jump forward, backward or sideways in time. "That can sometimes be a challenge. The biggest problem is people hitting the wrong buttons."

THREEDOM

If *Comedy Bang! Bang!* (see next column) is a margarita, *Threedom* is a triple shot of Patrón with no chaser. The podcast launched in March with *CBB* all-stars Tompkins, Lauren Lapkus and Scott Aukerman—who basically wanted to share their hilarious friendship with everyone. "Listening to it is almost like I'm not listening to us. Hearing our dynamic recorded is

like listening to three people I don't know, but I enjoy their enjoyment of each other."

THE DEAD AUTHORS PODCAST

On this now dormant series, H.G. Wells (Tompkins) uses his time machine to bring dead authors into the present for interviews. It leads to sometimes educational hilarity, such as when Ben Schwartz, playing his childhood favorite, Roald Dahl, was asked about the writer's notorious anti-Semitism. "Ben was crushed. It was crazy to see all the emotions he was having while trying to keep up his character."

IMPROV

COMEDY BANG! BANG!

Scott Aukerman's weekly show is the north star of the Tompkins-verse. First contributing in 2009, Tompkins quickly built the improv muscles that would turn him into the most eligible guest in all of podcastdom. While his voices vary wildly, his off-mike laughter is a constant. "I stopped trying to stifle it. I'm not going to act like I'm above it—or that it didn't earn my laughter."

WITH SPECIAL GUEST

LAUREN LAPKUS

Each episode's "guest" serves as "host" and creates a new concept for the show. Tompkins has

dropped in a few times, playing characters from his extended universe, including Santa Claus to Lapkus's naughty elf, Ho Ho. "You try to paint the other person in a corner more because you are friends and because you know it will be fun watching them wriggle out of it."

POP CULTURE

WHO CHARTED?

For hosts Kulap Vilaysack and Howard Kremer, *Who Charted?* is a chance to riff on the top entertainment of the week. For Tompkins, a frequent guest, it's a chance to learn what the hell kids are listening to. "I don't even mind being the old man saying, 'This song is dumb.'"

HOW DID THIS GET MADE?

Hosted by Paul Scheer, June Diane Raphael and Jason Mantzoukas, the podcast dissects the film flops we love to hate. For one of Tompkins's episodes, he endured *Lake Placid*, the 1999 giant-crocodile horror-comedy. "There was so much about that movie that did not make sense and was not justified."

FANTASY

HELLO FROM THE MAGIC TAVERN

Tompkins's characters have a flair for the fantastical, so they're a natural fit on this dispatch from an alternate dimension, hosted by Arnie Niekamp. "I always admire world building. Also knowing what a burden that is to be the keeper of a lore—it's a pain in the ass."

SUPEREGO

Tompkins joins fellow cast members Jeremy Carter, Matt Gourley and Mark McConville for "case studies" such as "H.R. Giger," in which the *Alien* artist pickles black licorice. The show has been up on blocks since 2016, but here's the good news, fans: "We got some live shows coming up. *Superego* is not done yet!" ■



THE SHAPE OF COMEDY TO COME

A loose cohort of Brooklyn comedians is dreaming up a sensibility—both eccentric and engaged—that might just help us all make it to the future

Julio Torres is describing a joke in progress. “I saw the Marilyn Monroe over-the-subway-grate picture,” says the 31-year-old stand-up comedian and *Saturday Night Live* writer. “I haven’t stopped thinking about the subway grate looking back at that scene, going, ‘Oh, we don’t do that anymore. It’s a different time.’”

Torres has built a career on a delicate balance of wistfulness, randomness and social commentary. (You’ve probably chortled at a few

BY **MEREDITH ALLOWAY**

Torres-penned *SNL* sketches, including “Melania Moments,” featuring a pensive

first lady, or “Wells for Boys,” about a Fisher-Price toy for sensitive little guys.) He’s not alone: A loosely defined and refreshingly diverse community of comics, led by Torres, Ana Fabrega, Lorelei Ramirez, Ikechukwu “Ike” Ufomadu and Patti Harrison, is rising from the still-fertile soil of Brooklyn. Spanning stand-up, sketch and performance art, their work takes on immigration, trans rights, queerness and more—all with an off-kilter humanity. It’s not only intelligent, fresh and brimming with potential; it’s also just fucking hilarious.

The group came together over the past few years at comedy nights around town. And though they can riff effortlessly on topics like finding love at the Westminster dog show (“I saw sparks,” Ramirez says, about a black Russian terrier, in a standout sketch), they acknowledge that the culture has heated up considerably over the past two years or so. Harrison, a trans artist, recognizes that “we’re not in a cultural climate where identity is not at the forefront.” And Torres, who considers much of the crew’s early work apolitical, says that when the societal energy shifted after the 2016 election, so did the group’s mind-set. “Sometimes our very presence, even though we’re not doing anything political, is inherently political,” he says. “Me existing in itself is some sort of statement.”

Join us as we get to know these exciting and deeply weird young Brooklynites.



JULIO

With his platinum-blond locks and ever-bemused expression, Julio Torres (pictured left) met *PLAYBOY* at a vegan spot—fitting, given one of his set openers: “I am vegan. And I am so sorry.” He pauses for laughs. “People ask me if I miss meat or dairy. I mean, I miss being liked.” It’s this salty yet sincere tone that makes Torres actually very easy to like. In one of his first appearances on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, he gave Halloween costume ideas such as “Raccoon, Foolishly Wearing All the Diamonds He Stole.” Originally from El Salvador and already accomplishing his dream of writing comedy in New York—it’s his third year at *SNL*—Torres is also being sought for his take on issues like immigration. “Sometimes you have to be explicit,” he says. He’s also touring with his splendid live show *My Favorite Shapes*, in which he showcases miniature swans, squares and other beloved objects on a small conveyor belt and insists that his favorite color is “clear.” Asked about the source of such abstractions, Torres just laughs: “My entry point to something isn’t most people’s entry point to something.” Up next? An HBO pilot with Fred Armisen and Ana Fabrega that follows a group of horror-makeup artists around Mexico City. Shot 80 percent in Spanish and 20 percent in English, the show, like the rest of Torres’s work, is shaping up to be quietly, charmingly subversive.

ANA

At a recent gig in Williamsburg, Ana Fabrega (left) read from her journal and did impressions in rapid succession—blink and you’d miss the “girlfriends out to lunch hearing the specials.” She does it again over coffee, smiling and nodding in a way that says, “*Oooh*, that sounds great, doesn’t it?” After years of feeling like her writing structure wasn’t “right” for comedy, Fabrega saw Torres and Ramirez perform. Something clicked: “Oh,” she thought, “I can just do the thing I want to do.” Since then, she has written for *The Chris Gethard Show* and developed her skill for hysterically dry character bits (military brat, regional



theater actress, “someone who spins rotisserie chicken at Boston Market”). In her online sketch “Meet Me at the Met,” with Fred Armisen, Fabrega matches his deadpan tone as they try to find each other outside the crowded museum. “I look like I’m recalling a fond memory,” she tells him over the phone. To her, there’s an element “so human about wanting to express yourself and not being able to. I’ve felt like that too.” As Fabrega takes her inventive voice to a number of new projects, she tells us, “The people I feel most inspired by right now are people I’m around.”

LORELEI

Torres recalls the first time he saw Lorelei Ramirez (middle) perform. She asked the crowd questions, and when they answered, “she would roll her eyes and open her mouth and go ‘ahhhhhhhhh.’ It was so disturbing and funny and beautiful,” he says. “I like fucking with people,” Ramirez explains. “I like playing with expectations, especially in joke formats.” The Miami native’s pitch-black humor, which often deals with mortality, family and the dark side of emotion (her site is PileofTears.com), suffuses her work. You can’t tell if she’s playing herself or a woman who has wandered out of an extra-sinister *Black Mirror* episode. In her video trilogy “Milkshake” she plays a housewife who becomes progressively more unhinged as she attempts to prepare the titular treat. “I don’t have to just share a story about my life to make you laugh,” she says. “We can laugh at how insane our minds can get.” So are audiences gravitating toward escapism in comedy? “After the Trump stuff, people were like, ‘Who’s doing absurdist stuff? I just want to escape!’ We’ve literally been doing this forever.”



IKE

Ike Ufomadu (bottom) didn’t watch late-night talk shows till 2011, and they perplexed the NYU Tisch School of the Arts graduate. “I was struck by how odd it was that Letterman had to wear suits every night and sit at a desk,” he says. “What’s the psyche of a person who wants to entertain people but needs to wear a suit at a desk to do it?” It’s a loaded question in a landscape where we turn to a handful of hosts for cultural insight and laughs in one straining package. With his live late show *Ike at Night*, which has run at New York’s legendary Public Theater, Ufomadu is looking more and more like the next generation of TV host. His work is so slow, so dry and so demanding of your attention, you can’t help but laugh—usually long after you’ve stopped expecting to do so. “I think I have a performing persona,” he says. “It’s this old-school entertainment type.” This summer he’s headed to the Kennedy Center for the District of Comedy Festival while continuing to develop his own late-show schemes. His urge to deconstruct the “TV personality,” combined with his matter-of-fact and painfully sincere humor, might be just the take we need.

PATTI

With only three years of New York life under her belt, Patti Harrison (top) has already landed roles on *Search Party* and *Broad City* and been asked to comment on trans military rights for *Jimmy Fallon*. She’s graced a number of sketches in collaboration with Seriously.TV—such as “Convers(at)ion Therapy,” in which she features trans and queer guests and “converts” them back to “cis majesty.” What’s most interesting to her is “writing something that subverts expectations.” Case in point: In *Slurp*, her short film with Catherine Cohen, two women sit eating what appear to be ice cream cones until white goo is running down their chins and staining their tops. “You know what I’m in the mood for?” Cohen asks. “Ice cream.” Harrison’s work is proving to be unlike anything else in the comic landscape. “I’d love to have a TV show that’s about worms and farts and boogers and jizz and all that stupid-ass shit,” she says, but adds that there’s power in her status as a rising trans artist. “I realize we’re in a really irregular cultural state in our country and it would be an active choice to omit it,” she says. Harrison isn’t backing down from speaking her mind anytime soon, continuing her live show *It’s a Guy Thing* in Brooklyn and providing much-needed inspiration for other underrepresented voices. “I don’t want to make things that are boring,” she says. “I don’t want to speak with someone else’s tone anymore. I want to do things that are unabashedly *me*.” ■

SIX TYPES OF LAUGHS

THE KNOWING CHUCKLE



TRANSLATION: THAT WAS A WITTY JOKE CONTAINING A REFERENCE I'M PROUD OF MYSELF FOR GETTING, AND ALSO MY SENSE OF INTELLECTUAL SUPERIORITY IS ALL I HAVE LEFT

THE VINDICATED CACKLE

HA-HAA!!



TRANSLATION: SOMEONE HAS DRAGGED YOUR EX ON TWITTER, PROVIDING YOU WITH ALL THE SCHADENFREUDE WITHOUT YOU HAVING TO LOOK LIKE A MALICIOUS BITCH

THE BRO GUFFAW

HUH HUH HUH
YEAH!



TRANSLATION: IF I DON'T LAUGH AT THESE JOKES ABOUT CHICKS MY FRAT BROTHERS ARE GONNA CALL ME A QUEER

OH GOD AM I GAY

HYSTERICIS

HAHAHAHA
HAHAHA
HAHAA
HAAA
HA



TRANSLATION: I AM LAUGHING SO I DON'T MURDER EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU MOTHERFUCKERS

THE SHOCKED SCREAM-LAUGH

MPHHH
AIDEN!!



TRANSLATION: YOUR KID JUST KICKED A NEIGHBOR YOU HATE IN THE BALLS

THE WINCE-GIGGLE

OH! HA
HAHA HEEE
HO HOOOO-



TRANSLATION: YOUR GIRL JUST SLIPPED A FINGER INTO YOUR BUTTHOLE AND YOU'RE NOT TOTALLY SURE ABOUT THIS BUT- BUT WAIT, MAYBE IT'S OK??

e.flake



THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON JOKES

Scientists have scanned the brains of comedians and found that they're basically addicts

BY **ERIC SPITZNAGEL**

Ori Amir has always been fascinated with how a comedian's brain works. "There's been so much research about what goes on in the brain when you *enjoy* humor," says the neuroscientist, who moved to the U.S. from Israel to study at the University of Southern California. "But nobody has looked at the neural activity that happens when you try to come up with a joke."

So Amir and Irving Biederman, professor of psychology and neuroscience at USC, recruited 22 amateur and professional comedians, including six improvisers from the Groundlings—the Los Angeles theater that launched the careers of Will Ferrell and Melissa McCarthy, among others—and asked them to come up with captions for *New Yorker* cartoons while having their brains scanned. (We've visualized one of those scans below.) "It's not easy to be funny while lying in an MRI machine," Amir says. "There was a lot of complaining."

The scans revealed two curious things. First, when professional comedians create a joke, there's more activity in the parts of the temporal lobe known for abstract thought; amateurs create humor primarily in their prefrontal cortex, which is all about rational decision-making. The data seem to indicate that the best jokes rely more on unfocused daydreaming than problem-solving.

The researchers also found that when we think up a funny idea, regions with a high density of opioid receptors—the proteins that control feelings

of euphoria or reward—become more active. Once those receptors get triggered, they flood the brain with dopamine. It's the same rush that comes with indulgent eating or having sex—or doing drugs. Are comedy writers just junkies who prefer laughs to narcotics? "That's our theory," Amir says.

Andrew B. Newberg, director of research at the Marcus Institute of Integrative Health, conducted a similar study in 2016, inviting comedians from *The Onion*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and other comedy cornerstones to have their brains studied. He noticed smaller structures in their basal ganglia, the region involved in the release of dopamine, which could suggest that "comedians seek out comedy because they need more stimulation in order to feel happy."

So how do these findings sit with actual comedians? Scott Dikkers, a founding editor of *The Onion* and owner of especially small basal ganglia, has doubts. "Certainly the delivery of comedy in a live environment, where you're actually getting laughs, triggers that response," he says. "But the creating of it, when you're alone in your apartment, trying to produce jokes on a blank computer screen? That's miserable work, the polar opposite of sex or drugs."

Either way, let's be thankful that our favorite comedians are strung-out joke junkies and finding the perfect punch line is the only thing that gets the monkey off their back. ■

The striatum (hidden from view) is involved in dopamine, the "feel-good" molecule; it's practically on fire.

Comedians have "greater asymmetry in the size of their thalamus" (also hidden from view), says Newberg, which helps with daydreaming.

The prefrontal cortex, responsible for rationality, is less active in professional comedians.

The temporal lobe, which handles abstract thought, is ablaze with "hot" colors, indicating greater activity.

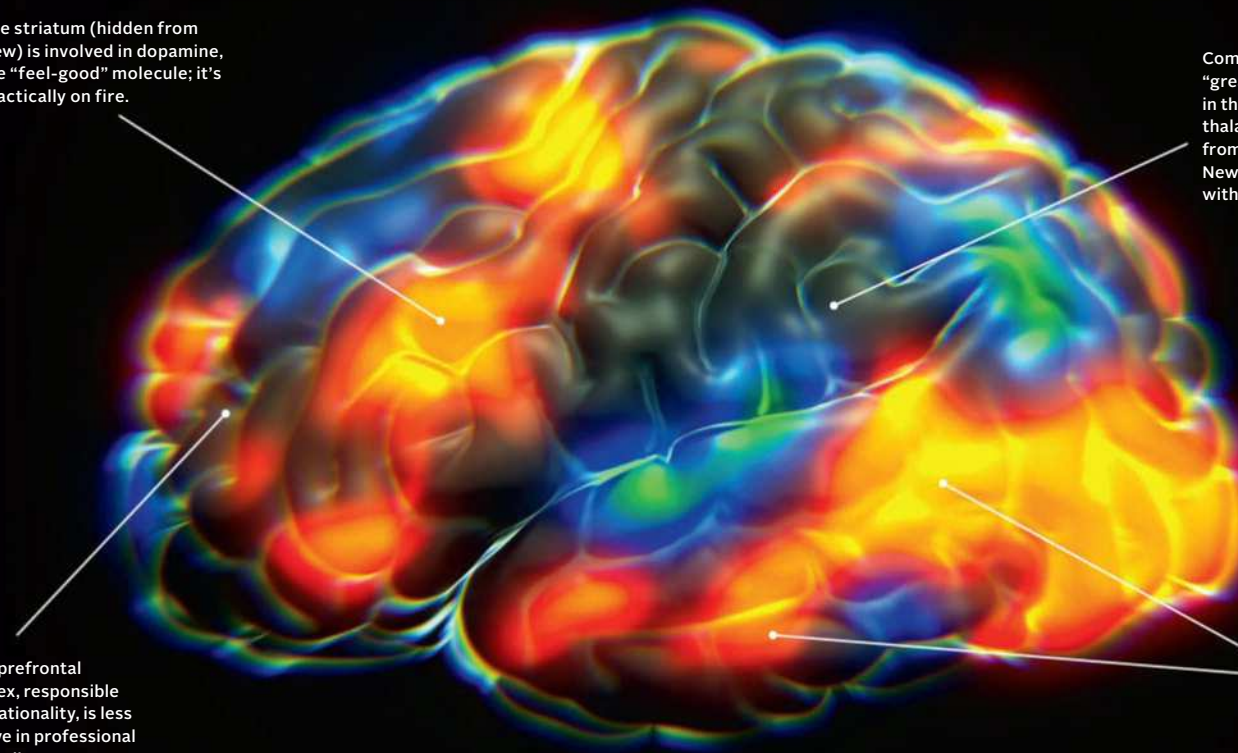


ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN METZ



Love in the Time of Comedy

A Conversation With Nicole Byer

Looking for love while bringing laughter to the masses is not easy; a comedian offers hard-won tips

Nicole Byer can be found judging earnest baking projects as a host of the new Netflix series *Nailed It!*, and she talks a whole lot about nailing other things on her podcast *Why Won't You Date Me?* But the one thing she hasn't nailed, as the title of the latter show implies, is the art of the long-term relationship. In her inimitable phrasing: "I've never been in a relationship where someone has farted on me and we're, like, cool about it." But LTRs be damned, Byer is a geyser of wisdom on the mysteries of love—wisdom that we men (including one very famous DJ) should heed.—*Tim Donnelly*



PLAYBOY: On your podcast you interview guys you've hooked up with. What have you gleaned from those conversations about how we can be better at dating?

BYER: We don't want you to ghost us. You can tell me that you are not into me; you can say, "I had a great time, but I truly don't see this going anywhere. I'll never text you; I'll never call you. If you text or call me, I'm going to be nice about it and say, 'Maybe we should hang out on Thursday,' but guess what—Thursday doesn't fucking exist." You can be mean. You can literally tell me, "I fucked you once and I never want to fuck you again," and you're not going to hurt my feelings.

PLAYBOY: Is that true? A lot of guys think just saying nothing is gentler.

BYER: Absolutely! People like answers. That's why there are researchers, that's why there are scientists: You're trying to find answers for shit. That's why people go to the fucking moon—because we want to know what's up there.

PLAYBOY: You talk a lot in your comedy about using dating apps. What's the best strategy for picking photos of yourself to put online?

BYER: If you're fat, you gotta show off your fatness. If you're in a wheelchair, you gotta show off that you're in a wheelchair. Essentially, Tinder and all these apps are blind dates. You start texting and you think you

know the person; you don't fucking know the person. You have to tell them everything about you. Fat ladies love to take the above-angle selfies because then they have one chin. But when you meet the dude or the woman in person, they'll see your second and third chins. They should know about it before you go out. I have this one picture of me holding a two-foot dildo. I had it up as, like, a barometer: If you could have an opening conversation with me without mentioning that, maybe you're worth talking to.

PLAYBOY: Have you gone out with someone whose pictures were a complete lie?

BYER: I had one guy who looked like he was tall in his pictures but ended up being five-foot-two. He was, like, touching the ceiling in the picture, but after I met with him I went back and looked at his profile and was like, "Oh my God, he's in a basement room. The door frame is the same height as the fucking ceiling." He was also very boring. He was trash.

PLAYBOY: In this moment in history, lots of single guys want to come off right away as allies or woke or at least not a Louis C.K. creep. What can you tell them?

BYER: If you don't get it, then be a creep. Don't pretend to be something you're not. If you are woke and you think you understand women,

then you don't need to showcase that; she'll know it when she's with you. Men have been fed such toxic shit for such a long time. Everybody's learning. Women are learning that what they thought was okay isn't really okay, and men are learning that what *they* thought was okay isn't okay. I don't think you need to present yourself as a savant of intersectional feminism. If a woman says, "Hey, buddy, that was pretty sexist," you go, "Oh shit, sorry about that. Can you explain why? Because I honestly don't know; otherwise I wouldn't have said it."

PLAYBOY: Has any date pulled a *Nailed It!* and tried to bake something impressive for you?

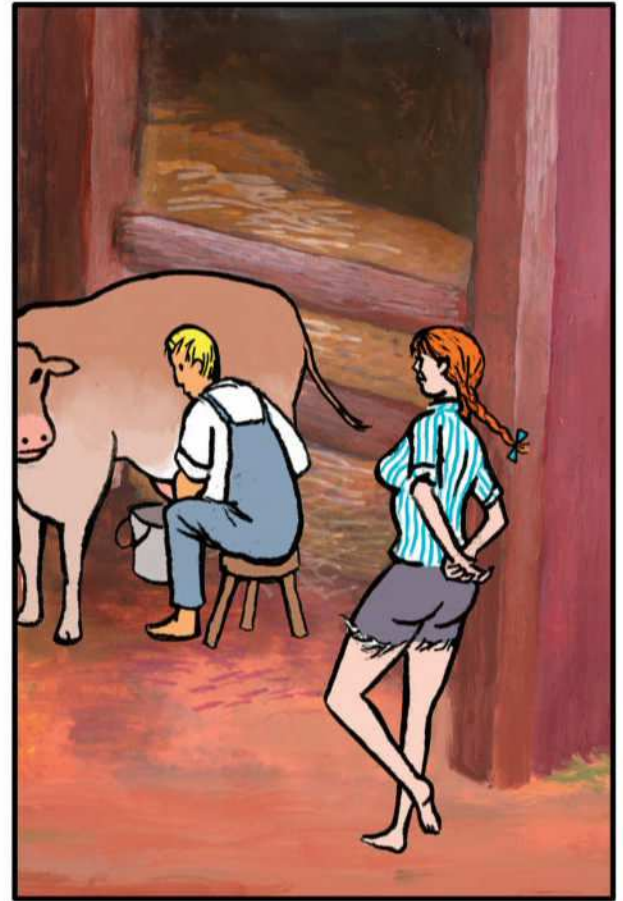
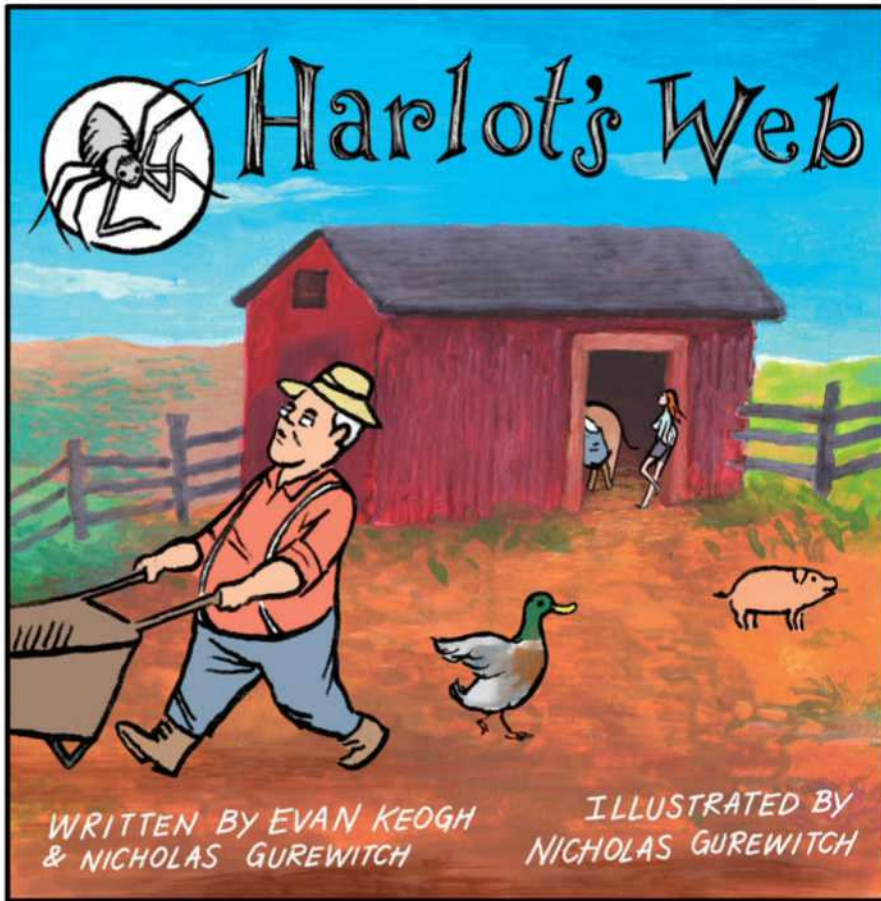
BYER: This one guy made me pancakes that were gross. He made this blueberry compote syrup. I was like, "You think you're better at this than you are." How do you screw up pancakes? I dated him on and off for three fucking years. I just never ate anything else he made.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever date your fans?

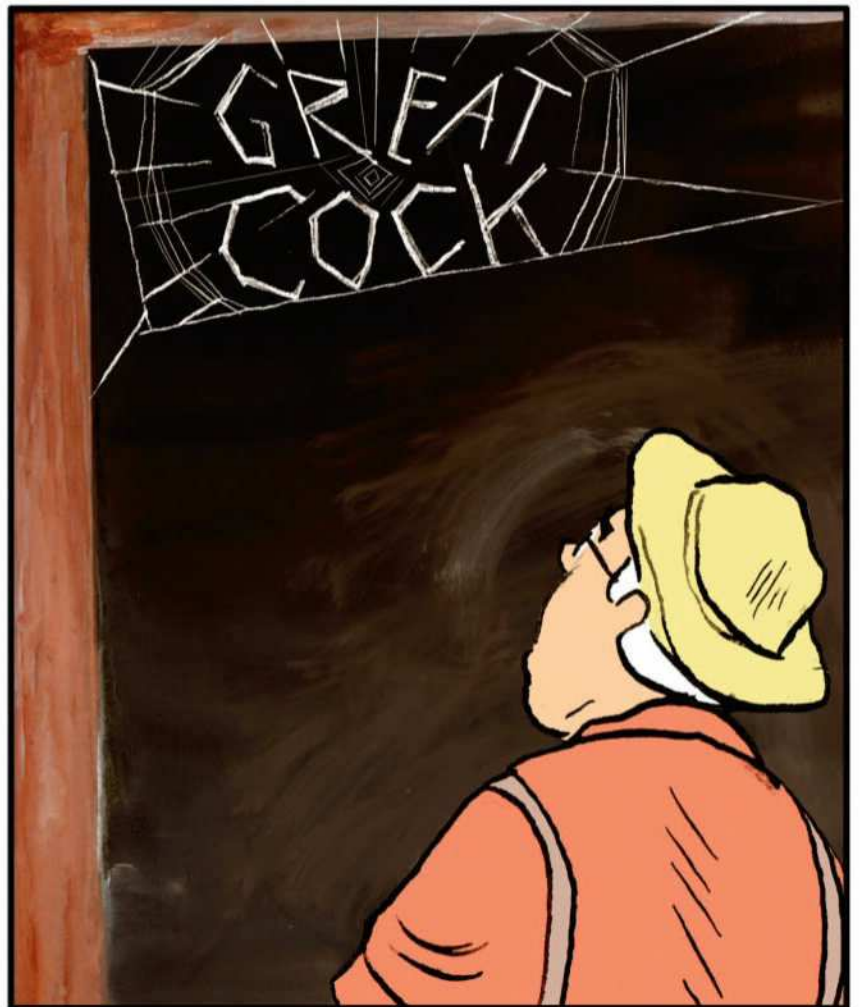
BYER: No. There's no such thing as chuckle-fuckers for women. I've never met a female comic who's like, "Yeah, after my shows dudes are lining up trying to fuck me." The compliments I get from men after shows are usually "I don't like women, but you're funny" or "You're funny for a girl." Men get so many chuckle-fuckers because all a man has to do is be slightly funny and have a dick.

PLAYBOY: Let's end on a slightly odd question, considering your romantic track record: What can all guys do to be better partners?

BYER: You need to be more responsive. If a girl is texting you 100 times a day, fucking text a bitch back. And eat her out. Eat out women! If you want your dick sucked, you have to. Not everyone's a DJ Khaled. DJ Khaled makes millions of dollars a year. That's why he gets to do whatever he wants. I'll go "*Ha ha ha!*" at your dumbest joke; a lot of women will do that. You're not funny. We're laughing because we're hoping you'll eat our pussy. ■















PLAYMATE

Lifesaver

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ANA DIAS



July Playmate **Valeria Lakhina** brings her fiery charm from the chilly streets of Moscow to the sun-baked shores of Portugal

Ukraine-born and Moscow-based, our July Playmate hails from a locale known for unforgiving winters. Her gently lilting accent and Slavic-royalty looks are dead giveaways as to her origins, but there's nothing harsh about Valeria Lakhina—or Lera, as her friends call her. The exuberant redhead is a ray of sunshine; perhaps that's why she looks so at home in this sultry pictorial shot on the coast of Setúbal, just south of Lisbon. Lera's bright disposition inspires her to see the best in people—a trait that sometimes puts her at a disadvantage: She was recently pickpocketed by an elderly woman after making courteous conversation with her on the street. Clearly, this Playmate errs on the side of kindness.

Asked to describe herself, Lera offers, "Happy, thankful, a little bit crazy and trusting. Maybe too trusting sometimes!" She cherishes her optimistic outlook, along with her freckles and readiness to try new things, which currently include forays into acting and producing.

Lera started modeling—almost by accident—at the age of 22. "Typical story. I was waitressing and got 'discovered,'" she says, laughing sheepishly. Prior to that, she completed degrees in her two other passions: children's education and psychology. The former teacher still works with kids whenever she can. Off-hours, her idea of a good time is simplicity itself. "Maybe a few years ago, I would have said 'going out,'" she says. "But now I just like talking to people—friends in the world of psychology, from my camera crew, yoga teachers. I love having long conversations about human nature."

When it comes to love, she values honesty above all else. "I also get turned on by the mind and sense of humor in a man," she says. Last but certainly not least, the globe-trotting model (who often travels with her twin sister, Vlada) adores surprises. "Anything! The smallest surprise, just to know a guy is thinking about me."

Gentlemen, take note. Lera, we wish you a summer full of surprises great and small.





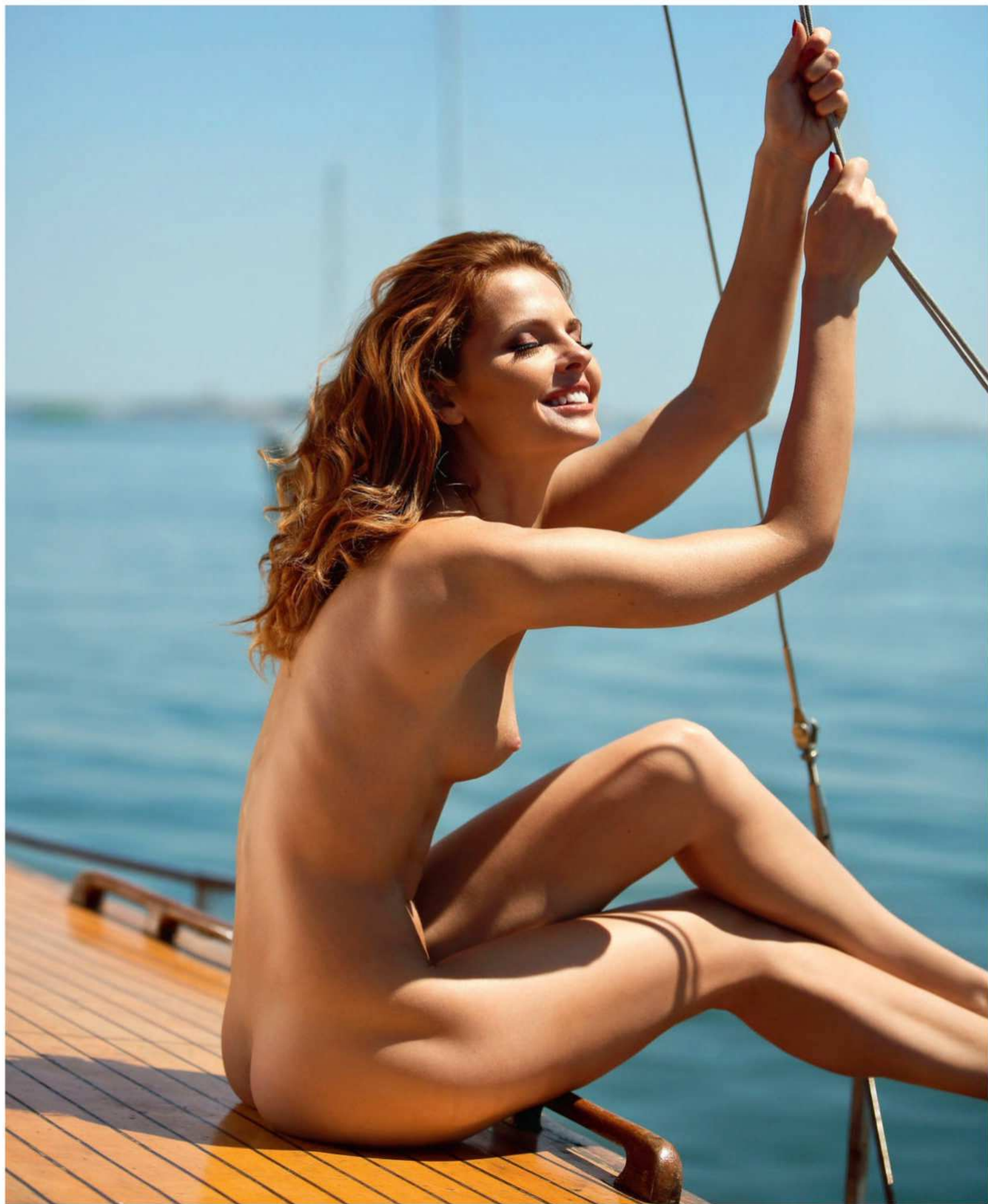














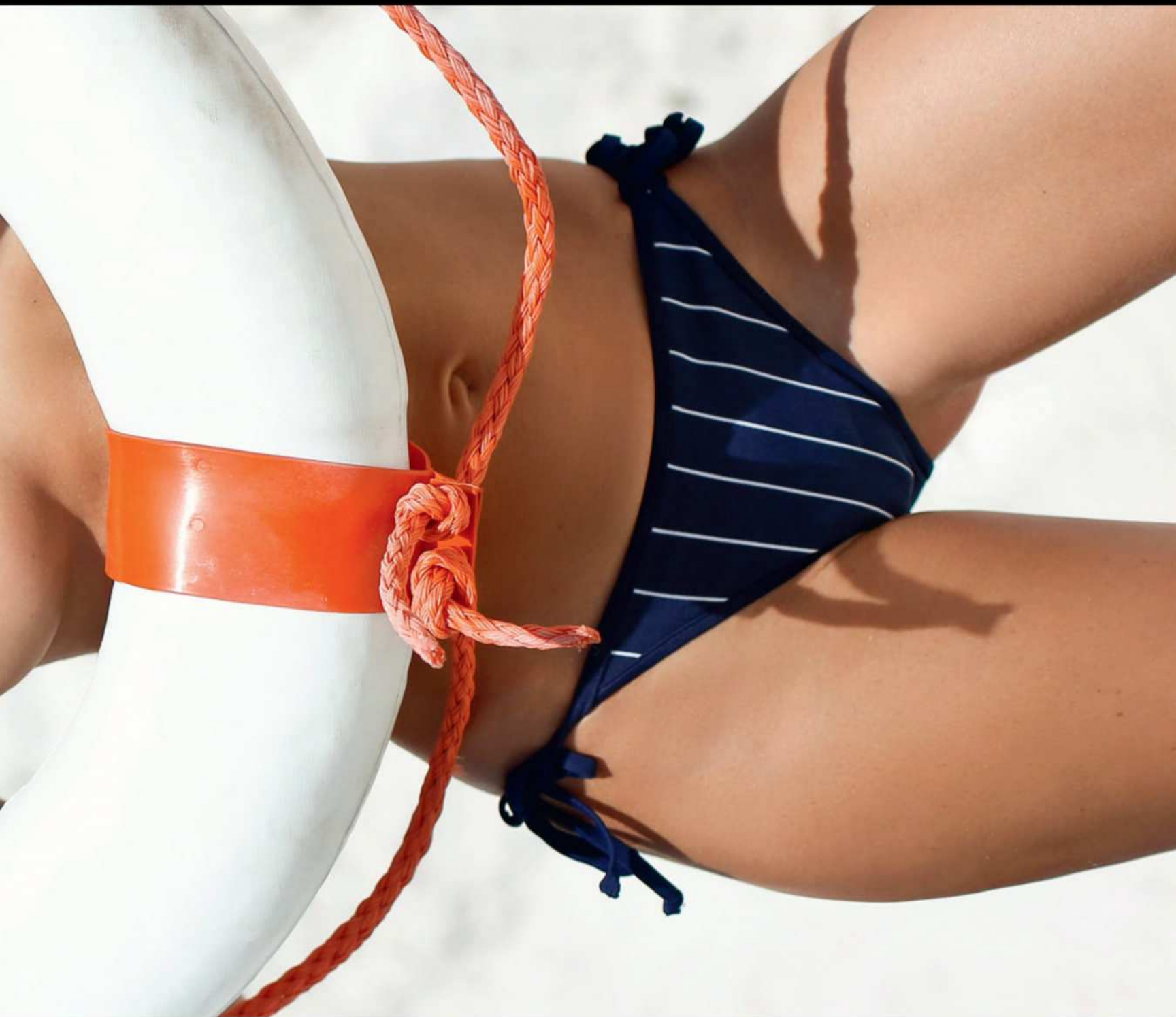
BIG BROTHER
IS IGNORING
YOU

ROUMIEV



JULY 2018

PLAYBOY'S PLAYMATE OF THE MONTH





DATA SHEET



BIRTHPLACE: Stakhanov, Ukraine **CURRENT CITIES:** Moscow, Russia and Kiev, Ukraine

FLOAT ON

When a person falls in love, they have a feeling of levitating off the ground, as if wings have grown. My idea of a perfect date is drifting in a hot-air balloon at sunset. We'd listen to Coldplay, laugh a lot and feel extremely delighted we'd met. On the other hand, any date can be perfect if I'm spending time with someone I like—and he's trying hard to impress me!

SIREN CALL

I feel sexiest when I'm at the seaside—with freckles, a suntan and droplets of saltwater in my hair—and also when I'm dancing.

GOOD MORNING

I try to begin my mornings with good music. I especially like waking my friends with some cheerful songs when they stay at my house for the night. Anything

from jazz to rap, Michael Jackson to Rammstein. I always take a warm shower. If I'm not abroad, I'll try to do a workout—Pilates, boxing, TRX. I like to eat tasty breakfasts, but I don't like to cook them!

EASY DOES IT

When I'm getting ready for a party or an event, I'll just wash my hair and do my makeup to look as natural as possible. I'm not a fan of smoky eyes, red lipstick or complicated hairstyles. I put on jeans, a T-shirt, high heels, a little face oil, and I feel great!

MUSIC MUSINGS

I'm an absolute music lover. My playlist currently includes Florence and the Machine, Bishop Briggs, Kings of Leon, Tom Odell and Aretha Franklin. My favorite band is the Hurts, from England. My dream is to get a part in one of

their music videos. What if they're reading this and they invite me? Fingers crossed!

WORK IN PROGRESS

My main weakness—and I'm actively trying to improve myself—is that sometimes I'll say something that's unintentionally offensive. Another weakness is that occasionally I can be extremely lazy.

PURE AND SIMPLE

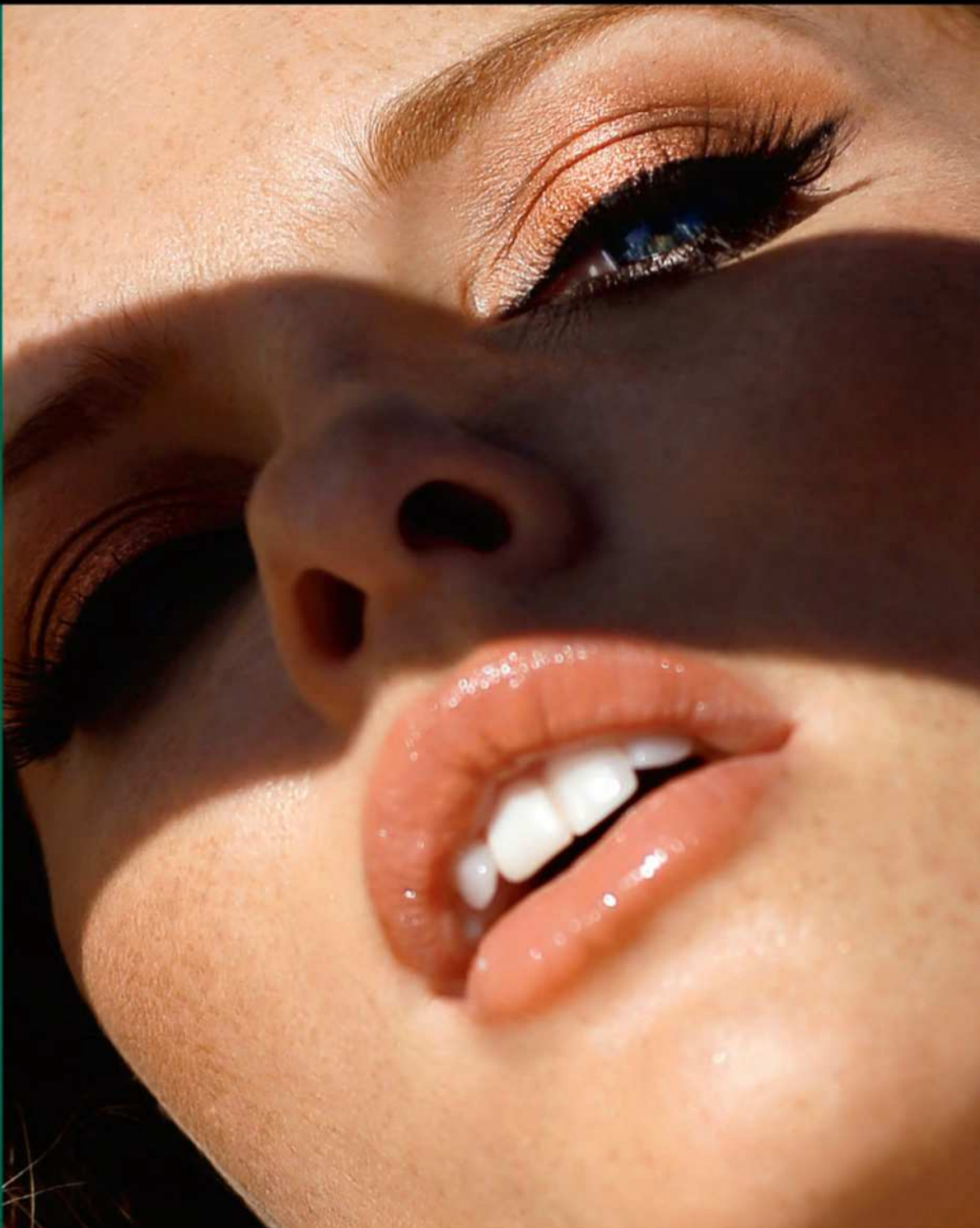
My favorite food is borscht, a really old-school soup from my home country. As for my favorite drink, it's really simple: just water with lemon.

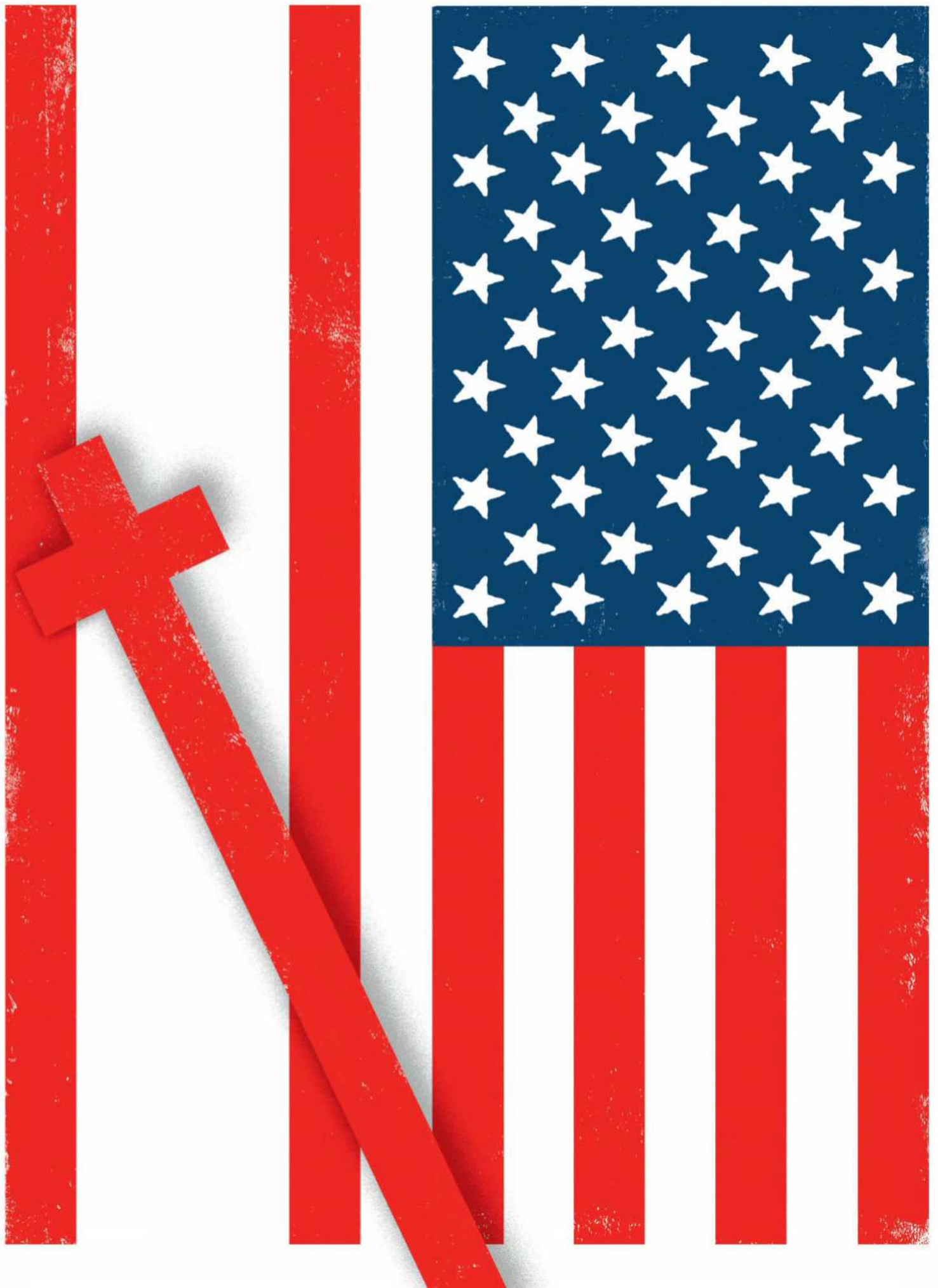
STATES OF MIND

I've never been to the United States, and I want to go so badly. I'm ready. Next year at this time I want to be in Los Angeles—preferably at a Playboy party!

@leralakhina









AMONG *the* ATHEISTS

A former minister immerses himself in the American Atheists convention, bearing witness to the nonbeliever movement as it rises from the ashes of 2016

Touching down at Will Rogers airport in Oklahoma City, I request a ride; within minutes a young woman named Sandra pulls up to take me to my hotel. Contemporary Christian music plays quietly from her radio, a cross hangs from the rearview and a Bible peeks out from the door pocket at my feet. I recognize Sandra, though not personally. Sandra is me several years ago, back when I was on a mission to save a world doomed to hell by any means necessary. Planting seeds, we called it.

What she doesn't know, and what I don't bother to tell her, is that I was ordained as a minister in the Southern Baptist Convention. Sandra might have admired me back when I was attending dinner parties with Judge Roy Moore and riding on Herman Cain's bus. Now she probably wouldn't be a fan. About six years ago, after a long stretch of mounting self-hate and force-fed guilt, I became an atheist. Today, Sandra's passenger is in town to attend the 2018 American Atheists National Convention.

I was raised to believe that Madalyn Murray O'Hair, founder of American Atheists and subject of the recent Netflix docudrama *The Most Hated Woman in America*, was a drug-addled, devil-worshipping sex maniac. So I honestly have no idea what to expect at this convention except maybe drug-addled, sex-crazed devil-worshipping. Just a few years ago I might have been in the street, protesting such an event, and now I'm a registered attendee.

What a time to be alive.

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I'm here, in part, to see how the atheist move-

ment, the vanguard of the roughly 27 percent of Americans who identify as nonreligious, has changed since the election of Donald Trump. Does the president's overwhelming support from evangelical Christian voters stand to threaten the rights of nonbelievers and religious liberty itself? White evangelicals, according to the Pew Research Center, gave Trump 81 percent of their vote, at least three



Donald Trump at Great Faith Ministries International in 2016.

percent more than they gave any of the previous three Republican presidential nominees.

With his track record of rough language and sexual bravado and apparent zeal for most of the deadly sins, Trump does not immediately come across as the man for dedicated Christians. (He called the Bible his favorite book in a 2015 interview and then declined to identify a single verse.) Barack Obama was a profess-

ing Christian long before he entered the White House, and yet evangelicals by and large despised him. George W. Bush, a man of deep faith who shares the evangelical vision of a Second Coming, garnered nearly the same base as Trump. If you disregard the possibility of this support having anything to do with sexism, racism, homophobia and xenophobia, it would take quite a bit of mental gymnastics to make sense of the current situation.

In a noisy banquet room being prepared for the American Atheists' awards dinner, I meet up with Alison Gill, the group's legal and policy director, and staff attorney Geoffrey Blackwell to get a better understanding of what they've seen in the past two years. Gill tells me that, on the bright side, "there has been a real resurging interest in the electoral process and government." Many activists, advocates and philanthropists want to be more involved than before; she cites a "new wave of people" who are interested in running for office.

Gill also admits, "At the federal level we've just seen a wave of negative changes that really impede the separation of government and religion, a far greater assault than we could have first suspected."

Blackwell says one of the most consequential issues he is seeing is "the appointment of very questionable judges to federal judgeships." The Obama administration struggled to fill these openings, but the current administration is working more efficiently to load them with "far-right religious conservatives who are really putting at risk a lot of the precedents that

BY **J.W. HOLLAND** ILLUSTRATION BY **EDEL RODRIGUEZ**



our current understanding of religious freedom depends on.” Blackwell adds that Trump could end up appointing as many as 30 percent of those critical slots.

Gill points out that so far those confirmations include Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch and Seventh Circuit judge Amy Coney Barrett. Gorsuch authored the extremely conservative opinion *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, and Barrett, according to Gill, “was an academic who sought to advance the role of religion in interpreting certain legal rules and bodies of law.”

So it comes as a surprise when Gill and Blackwell mention that American Atheists finds agreement among some religious organizations. It turns out the Johnson Amendment—the 1954 tax code provision that prohibits all 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations from endorsing or opposing political candidates—has detractors on both sides. More than 100 religious organizations from around the country signed a letter to Trump last August, asking him to protect the Johnson Amendment. “Churches all over the country don’t want politics drawn into the sanctuary,” Blackwell says. With their flocks shrinking, some religious leaders are apparently concerned with Trump’s promises to repeal the amendment: “Why put churches in a position where they feel obligated to take a political position if they weren’t already doing

so?” Blackwell says. He adds that on several individual issues, including how nonprofits are treated by the IRS, churches and atheists stand together—“even if we disagree on the question of whether or not there is a deity.”

Neda Bolourchi, a research associate at the Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Theory and Empirics at Columbia University, shares Blackwell’s sentiments about finding common ground. Over e-mail she tells me that “there has been a confluence of support for the Johnson Amendment.... All of these have come together because they do not believe that religion is encumbered by this law, which has existed for over 50 years and been supported by both parties and all branches of government.” Bolourchi believes the only groups that would oppose this law are those that see 501(c)(3) organizations as easy vessels to introduce nearly untraceable “dark money” into politics. With the 2010 *Citizens United* decision and the financial floodgates it opened to campaign contributions, you can see a problem here: Millions of churches in America could become individual political action committees funded by virtually anonymous donors. Not only is that a problem for fair elections; it could also lead to compromised control over local religious bodies.

While much of the convention was focused on fighting what its organizers view as the current

threats to the separation of church and state, an almost equal amount of time was spent examining the steps atheists must take to claim an equal place in American society. The next day I meet with David Silverman, president of American Atheists, in the speakers’ green room. Less than two weeks after the close of the convention, Silverman will be fired after a brief investigation into sexual and financial misconduct. In a statement on his Facebook page, he will write (and then delete), “I categorically deny any wrongdoing, legally or ethically.” But here at the convention, Silverman is focused on a different upheaval.

“I think what we have seen over the past couple of years is a terrible depression on behalf of most of the American Atheists movement,” he says. President Obama had an open-door policy with religious and nonreligious leaders alike, even favorably mentioning the latter in his second inaugural address: “We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus and nonbelievers.” To date, Trump has refused to meet with the nontheistic community. “We went from a very high place to a very low place,” Silverman says. “We weren’t ready for that defeat.”

But this is a convention, not a wake, and Silverman makes a point that will echo many times throughout the weekend—a point that ironically reminds me of religious groups that

THE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF NONTHEISTS MAKES THEM THE LARGEST VOTING GROUP IN THE COUNTRY.



From left: Black Nonbelievers president Mandisa Thomas; keynote speaker Hugh Laurie; comedian Victor Harris Jr.



faced skepticism at best and bigotry at worst before entering the American mainstream. “I think we have seen the bottom,” he says. “This convention will be used to elevate the rest of the movement. If we come out and stop hiding behind euphemisms like *agnostic* or *humanist*, if we actually call ourselves atheists, we will be able to take our place at society’s table almost immediately.”

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With more than 850 attendees and a celebrity keynote speaker—*House* star Hugh Laurie—American Atheists appears to be taking its message on a more mainstream path than ever before. As I stand in the back of the ballroom, I can’t help noticing the attentiveness of the crowd. The room is packed but hushed. I don’t remember ever seeing a gathering this engaged for this length of time, even back in my days as a minister. The applause seems genuine, with the occasional standing ovation; none of it comes across as forced.

From the start of the convention, there has been an electricity in the air. In every corner of the hotel, I see attendees in deep conversation about everything from politics to sexuality. I find myself sharing personal information that many in my own family don’t know, and I sense no judgment. It occurs to me that I have never been this at ease with any other group of people in my life.

Multiple speakers extol the size of the country’s atheist voting bloc: The estimated number of nontheists, even on the modest end, makes them the largest voting group in the country. A 2016 Pew poll identified 20 percent of voters as white Evangelicals, while 21 percent held no religion—a whopping seven percent increase since 2008. Add that to a recent University of Kentucky study that shows as many as 26 percent of the population may be atheists, and you begin to see the potential influence of an organized nonreligious community. As Silverman suggested in our conversation, the issue among this group is not size but visibility. To harness our considerable potential, atheists must be more outspoken about our beliefs, or lack thereof.

Perhaps that emergence is already under way. Atheists are finding modest success in areas previously unthinkable: In Tennessee, Gayle Jordan, the executive director of Recovering From Religion, an organization that helps people deal with the repercussions of leaving their faith, ran for state senate, gaining around 30 percent of the vote in a deep red and highly religious district. Jordan tells me during the convention that her democratic supporters “were mostly religious people,



David Silverman, president of American Atheists until a legal and ethical scandal resulted in his ouster.

and I ran as an out and open atheist.” Shockingly, she was also able to garner the support of many among the state’s Tea Party. Faced with the choice between “an unethical Christian Republican or an ethical Democratic atheist,” Jordan tells me it was remarkable to see the voters of her district support her. Remarkable indeed, considering the results of the 2016 presidential elections. But when you consider the right’s almost three decades of attacks on Hillary Clinton’s character, it becomes clearer how evangelical voters were able to justify voting for Trump.

The most encouraging moment of the weekend comes when I introduce myself to Mandisa Thomas, president and founder of Black Nonbelievers, an organization dedicated to support and visibility for black atheists. Thomas, who was raised nonreligious, tells me that black nonbelievers often think they’re the only ones in what are traditionally heavily religious areas: “To say that you’re an atheist in the black community is almost like you’re trying to reject your race.” The reality, she says, is that with wildly disproportionate levels of violence, poverty and disease afflicting so many black communities, thoughts and prayers aren’t going to cut it.

“You have to say enough is enough,” she tells me. “At what point is praying or going to church going to resolve that? At what point are you

going to start thinking for yourself and putting more evidence-based measures into place?”

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That, in a nutshell, is what I take away from the convention: If you want things to change, you have to change them. Of course many religious organizations do great things for society, but those things often come with strings attached. Nonbelievers have the power to do good without the promise or threat of an omnipotent being.

I would like to say atheists have cornered the market on character, but Silverman’s messy departure from the organization just days after the convention serves as a reminder: No group is free of human error or frailty. Still, the work goes on. At the end of the convention—Easter Sunday, as it happens—organizers and volunteers purchase, pack and donate 30,000 meals for needy families in the area. Hundreds of atheists, including Dr. House, work shoulder to shoulder in a hotel ballroom. I leave for my ride back to the airport more encouraged than I’ve felt in years—not just in atheists but in humankind as a whole. One ideology doesn’t control the narrative for acts of kindness; it’s the responsibility of us all.

After that weekend in Oklahoma City, I feel empowered to parrot the sentiment of Hugh Laurie, who told a packed ballroom, “I stand before you a proud atheist.”

If I ever see Sandra again, I’m going to tell her. ■



SHOWDOWN on the HUDSON

FICTION BY WALTER MOSLEY

A cowboy in Harlem learns his code of conduct may not survive outside Texas—and neither may he

ILLUSTRATION BY MARC ASPINALL

How the whole thing started is a mystery to most people, even the police. But those of us who were around 145th Street and Broadway, up in Harlem, knew something new was happening the day Billy Consigas came to town. His mother had moved to New York from southern Texas to escape an abusive husband: “A roustabout name of Henry Ryder,” Billy told us.

And so Billy (who was 15 at the time) was forced to leave his beloved Texas for Harlem. He didn’t like New York at first, said that there was no place to stretch your legs or keep a horse. Some of us used to tease him but that never amounted to much because Billy was an honest-to-God, 100 percent bona fide black Texas cowboy. He wore a felt Stetson hat that was almost pure white. From the band of his hat hung a tassel of multicolored triple-stringed beads that he said was a gift from his Choctaw girlfriend when he had to leave Texas to come north. He wore fancy bright shirts with snap buttons made from garnet, topaz and quartz. His jeans were always well-worn and rough as sandpaper. And he boasted that he had cowboy boots for every occasion—from weddings to funerals.

He got in good with the girls because, before long, he had a job with the NYPD, training their horses in a special area of Central Park. He’d take young ladies up there in the early hours of the morning and teach them how to ride. Nesta

Brown told me that if a man takes a girl riding in the morning he will most likely be riding her that night.

She said “most likely” with a dreamy look in her eyes and a kiss on her lips.

Girls our age flocked around Billy and I never heard one of them call him a dog.

The black cowboy also had the most beautiful pistol any of us had ever seen. It was a silvery Colt Cowboy .44 six-shooter etched with all kinds of designs and finished with a polished horn handle. The holster for his 10-inch pistol was black with silver studs. And even though I am no fan of cowboy films, when I saw how fast Billy could draw I downloaded 14 cowboy films.

Billy drawled when he spoke and respected everyone he met. He’d always take his hat off inside or when in the presence of a woman or girl. And he could fight like a motherfucker.

One time, over by the Hudson, uptown, this big dude was chasing down some man that he claimed owed him money. The big man caught the little one and started beating him. The poor guy fell to the pavement and was bleeding from his mouth and forehead. That’s when the big man started kicking him.

After two or three kicks Billy Consigas walked up and said, “All right now, he’s had enough.”

When I tell you that the bully was big I mean it in every way possible: He was tall and fat and

had biceps almost the size of his head. He was fast too. He hit Billy—who was five-10 and 160 at most—right in the chest. Billy flew back and hit the wall behind him. We all thought he was going to get himself killed.

The little man on the ground got up and started running.

Billy pushed off from the wall, took a deep breath, and then he smiled. Smiled!

“Fuck you, you grinnin’ fool,” the big man yelled, and then he ran right at Billy.

Billy kept on smiling. He didn’t move until the guy was almost on him...and then he did an amazing thing. He jumped half a step to the right so that his attacker slammed into the wall. Then Billy jumped up on top of the guy and clamped his left arm around his neck. We didn’t know it at the time but that was the end of the fight right there. The big guy was twisting and jumping around but couldn’t throw Billy off, and Billy was steady, hitting him in the face with these wicked uppercuts. He must have hit him two dozen times before the behemoth slumped down on the sidewalk. The bully tried to get up three times but his legs were spaghetti and his shoes roller skates.

We never found out what happened to him because we heard sirens and scattered.

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After that fight Billy became like a hero among the young men and women up around 145th.





He didn't consider himself a leader because of something he called the Cowboy Code. I never got all the ins and outs of that system but it had something to do with being self-sufficient and treating all others equally. Leaders, he thought, were only for the weak.

"Felix," he said to me late one afternoon when I was showing him around Times Square, "a man has to stand up on his own two feet. The only leaders they should evah have is parents, teachers and generals during time of war. Other than that we all just people come from our mothers and headed for the grave."

Billy talked like that. He bought me a hot dog and I paid for our tickets to the wax museum. We walked in the crowds for hours. He was especially intrigued by the Singing Cowboy, who wore only a Stetson hat and underpants as he played the guitar and posed for photographs.

"What do you think about that?" I asked after Billy stared at the street performer for at least three minutes.

"Like any other child's cartoon on the television."

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It was somewhere past 11 in the evening when we decided to take the number 1 train back to Harlem. Billy had paid for our barbecue dinner. He told me that it was okay because the police gave him good money to train their horses.

When we were walking toward the train someone said, "I'll be damned, a nigger in a cowboy hat. I never seen anything like that before."

I turned first and saw a group of five young white men and three young women. They were maybe a year or two older than us. The guys sported new-looking blue jeans and fancy shirts like the ones Billy wore. The girls had on modern party dresses, slight and short. I was nervous because it was only the two of us against five of them, not counting the girls.

I say "against" because the leader, a tall and skinny guy with a long and somehow misshapen face, had used the word *nigger*, and that word—in that tone of voice and that situation—meant conflict.

Billy turned and smiled. I had come to associate that expression with sudden violence. This mental connection only added to my fear.

"A peckawood with a problem," Billy said jovially. "That's more common than rattle-snakes down a prairie hole."

"You sound like Texas," the speaker of the group speculated.

"And you sound like horseshit."

"Where you come from, boy?" the white youth asked.

"From a long line'a men."

In any other situation I would have run but I didn't want Billy to think less of me. So I squared my shoulders and wondered which one of the five I could get at before his friends got to me.

That was what Billy did: He made people happy and proud, brave and courageous—qualities that rarely served a poor black man or boy well.

"You think you man enough to take us?" the leader asked.

"At five to two?" Billy asked. "All we got to do is stand our ground and we prove better than some gang'a roughnecks."

The leader smiled, a grin that was a close relative of Billy's violent mirth.

I realized that I was holding my breath.

"My name is Nacogdoches," the white youth claimed. "Nacogdoches Early."

"Billy."

"You a cowboy, Billy?"

"I've been in a rodeo or two."

I thought of Billy taking down that giant on the Hudson. He wasn't afraid because he'd brought down steers with that same hold.

"You got a gun?" Nacogdoches inquired.

Billy shrugged.

"You a gunslinger?" Nacogdoches said to Billy.

"Faster'n you."

The warped-faced white youth's eyebrows raised and his smile broadened.

"Is one of these fine ladies your girl?" Billy asked.

A strawberry blonde moved her shoulders in such a way to indicate that she was the one.

"No bullets," Billy said as if they had already agreed on the gunfight. "Just a video camera feed. If you win I'll spit polish your green boots right on that corner in just my long Johns and hat at high noon on a Saturday. If you lose, that pretty girl will agree to have dinner with me at the place and time of my choosin'."

The girl tried to frown but instead a smile grazed her lips. She wasn't really that pretty, I thought, but had the kind of face that you'd want to nod to at a party or if you sat near her on a subway train.

Nacogdoches was biting his lower lip.

"Okay," he said at last. "When and where?"

"There's a youth center down on 63rd," I said. "Lazarus House. We do it there in three days at 10 at night."

In spite of the offer my plan was simply to get away.

The principals agreed and I gave Nacogdoches the address.

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"What kinda crazy luck you have to have that you run into another cowboy with a six-shooter somewhere in the middle of a million people?" I asked Billy on the number 1 train.

"It's the bright lights," the black cowboy opined.

"What?"

"You know a cowboy loves the stars more than anything. He's drawn to the lights like a moth to fire. Times Square is bright like the heavens come down to the ground. And you know two cowboys will see each other. No, no, Felix. It would be

a wonder if we *didn't* meet up sooner or later."

"We don't have to do this thing, Bill," I said.

"We just don't show up and it'll all blow over."

"Maybe so," he said, "but we will be there."

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All the youngsters in our neighborhood knew about the showdown, as Billy called it, scheduled for Wednesday night. They gossiped about it and bragged on their black cowboy hero.

In the interim I saw Billy every day because I was his assigned tutor.

"Hello, Felix," Mrs. Consigas greeted me on that Wednesday afternoon. She was a dark-skinned black woman with a young face. "You're a little early, aren't you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What's that you're carryin'?"

"My uncle's video camera."

"What for?"

"My sister's in a dance recital after and I'm going to video it for my mother. She works nights." It was all lies, but Marion Consigas didn't know my mother or my sister.

"You're a good boy, Felix Grimes." I spent the next two hours trying to teach Billy about variables in algebra. I was a good student, and, as far as school went, Billy was dumb as a post; he said so himself.

"It takes me a long time to get the idea," he said to me at our first tutoring session, "but once I got it, it's there forever."

He didn't talk about the showdown at all. I told some friends where it was happening, including Sheila Grant, a girl I wanted but who had eyes only for the Harlem Cowboy—Billy Consigas.

Billy struggled through the workbook lesson and somewhere around eight he said, "Time to go."

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We all—Billy, Sheila and five guys—arrived early. My brother Terrence, who worked at Lazarus House as a nighttime security guard, was waiting at the side entrance. He told us that Nacogdoches was already inside with his posse.

My brother was 19, three years older than I. He was nervous but Billy ponied up \$20 for the use of the gym, and Terrence was always looking for more money.

Nacogdoches was there with the same seven friends. This detail said something about the ugly Southerner that I couldn't quite put my finger on.

While I set up the tripod and video cam, Billy and Nacogdoches decided on the rules.

"Best out of three," the white cowboy said.

"And we check to make sure that each other's gun is empty before each duel," added Billy.

"Duel?" Nacogdoches sneered. "What are you, some kinda English faggot?"

"I am what I am," Billy said, "and that's more than enough for you."

Nacogdoches frowned and balled his fists. Billy wasn't school trained but he once told me that all true cowboys could sing and were poets.



The white gunslinger couldn't match him with words and so he said, "Thalia will count. On three we draw."

Billy nodded, no longer smiling.

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The duelists checked each other's gun and then took their places six steps apart. The white guy had a mean look on his face. Billy was as peaceful as moonlight on the Hudson. He wasn't handsome, but Billy had a look that made you feel like there was something good somewhere, something you could depend on.

Thalia, that was Nacogdoches's girl, counted out loud. When she got to three Nacogdoches slapped his brown leather holster, coming up with his black iron gun at incredible speed. But when we looked at the replay it was obvious, even to Nacogdoches's friends, that easygoing Billy had his piece out first. The black cowboy's movements were fluid, seamless.

Nacogdoches was slower on the second draw. We didn't even have to look at the replay.

before Nacogdoches had his barrel level.

"We could have hot dogs on that corner where I said I'd shine your boyfriend's shoes," Billy suggested to Thalia.

"No you won't," Nacogdoches said.

"That was the bet," Billy countered, the ass-kicking smile back on his lips.

"You didn't pull the trigger," his rival argued.

"Why I wanna pull on a trigger when I know the gun is empty?"

"You could draw faster if you didn't move your finger. Any fool could pull a gun out by its butt."

Billy squinted as if he was on his beloved prairie trying to make out a shadow on the horizon. He shook his head ever so slightly and then shrugged, moving his shoulders no more than an inch.

"Thank you, Terrence," Billy said waving to my brother, who was standing next to the exit door. "We finished here."

"You didn't pull the trigger," Nacogdoches

Two uniformed policemen were getting out of their black-and-white cruiser. Billy had his six-shooter in a battered brown leather satchel and the police had the right of stop-and-frisk.

Once again I had the urge to run but I knew that wouldn't end well.

One cop was white and the other black.

"What are you doing here so late at night, boys?" the black cop asked.

"Good evening, Officer O'Brien," Billy said to the white policeman.

"Consigas?" he replied.

"You get that parade trot down yet?"

"This is the kid I was telling you about, Frank," the white cop said to his partner. "He can do anything on a horse. A real-life cowboy from Texas."

"I was just playin' basketball with my friend Felix here down at Lazarus House," Billy said.

O'Brien asked Billy a few things about riding and then shook my friend's hand, shook his hand.

He had the silver gun out before Nacogdoches had his barrel level.

After that Billy started undoing the leather string that laced the bottom of the black and silver holster to his right thigh.

"What you doin'?" Nacogdoches asked.

"Two outta three," Billy said.

"I want the last draw."

"Why?"

"You scared?" Nacogdoches asked in a taunting tone.

Billy smiled and shook his head. He tied the lace again and I turned on the camera.

"One," Thalia said, and a sense of doom descended upon me.

"Two," she pronounced. It struck me that this last contest meant far more than two young men proving themselves.

"Three."

Nacogdoches was faster this time. He grabbed his piece and had it out like a real gunslinger in a fight for his life.

But Billy was faster still. On the video replay he had the silver gun out and had played like he was fanning the hammer with his left hand

said again.

"I won," Billy replied.

Terrence herded us out the door and onto 63rd.

Thalia, who was wearing black jeans and a calico blouse, walked up to Billy and shook his hand. He gave her a quizzical stare but she lowered her head and turned away.

"I won!" Nacogdoches said as he and his friends walked toward Central Park.

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We were headed to the train when Billy asked me to come with him as Sheila and the rest walked to the subway. He said he wanted to talk about something as we strolled north on Broadway.

But before he had the chance someone said, "Stop right there."

I was already nervous. Most of my life I had spent at my home, at church or in school, where I had been an honor student every year, every semester. I wasn't used to running the street with armed friends and watching duels.

"I thought the Cowboy Code said you shouldn't lie," I said when we were installed on the train.

"She gave me her phone number," Billy replied.

"What?"

"That Thalia gave me her phone number on a little piece of paper when she shook my hand."

"Damn."

"What do you think I should do?"

I was, as I said, a good student and the kind of citizen that stays out of trouble. I preferred books to TV and ideas as opposed to action, sweat or violence. I was always considered by my parents, teachers and, later on, by my employers, a good person. My only serious fault, as my father often told me, was that I often spoke without considering what it was that I said. This was most often a minor flaw, but in certain cases it could be a fatal one.

"You should call her and have lunch at that barbecue place with me and Sheila Grant," I advised. "That way it'll be friendly."



Billy called Thalia the next day. He told her what I had said (and later regretted), and she agreed to the date.

"She said," Billy told me, "that Nacogdoches had obviously lost and she felt that it was her obligation to go on a date with the winning cowboy."

The lunch was set for Saturday.

"What you mean he's goin' out with that white girl?" Sheila said when I asked her to come along.

"It's the bet," I explained lamely. "He kind of has to go."

"I bet he wouldn't think so if she was black."

"You know better than that, girl. Billy's doing it because he won and she knows it."

"Sounds stupid to me."

"That mean you're not comin'?"

...

We ordered hot links, brisket, fried chicken and pork ribs with corn bread, collard greens, fried pickles and a whole platter full of french fries.

lost her angry attitude when Thalia complimented her.

"So Nacogdoches is like some kind of juvenile delinquent?" Billy asked.

"He got in trouble down South stealing. I think his parents just wanted to get rid of him. Anyway he's graduating this June. Says he's going out to California."

That's when the food came. We spent the rest of the lunch talking and joking. Thalia was a painter who wanted to specialize in horses. That's what drew her to Nacogdoches. He kept a horse at a stable in Connecticut and promised to bring her up there someday.

"But now I think he was just sayin' that to get in good with me," the white girl added.

Billy said he'd take her to the police stables the next morning. He invited me and Sheila too.

"It's not a date unless you two kiss," Sheila said when we were out in front of the Iron Spur Barbecue House.

Thalia kissed Billy on the cheek and Sheila

walking side by side. Thalia's arm was linked with Billy's.

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Things returned to normal after that, more or less. I continued in my post as secretary of the student council and helped Billy write a paper for his remedial English class, an essay about a book of cowboy poetry his grandfather had given him. Sheila and Thalia became Facebook friends. They shared pictures and started telling each other about their experiences in different boroughs and at different schools.

Over the next two weeks I asked Sheila to go out with me six times, but she always had some reason to say no.

Then one afternoon Sheila was waiting outside my German class, clutching her beloved smartphone.

"Hey, Sheil," I said trying to sound nonchalant.

"Look at this," she said, thrusting the phone into my hand.

On the screen was a photograph of Thalia.

Two uniformed policemen were getting out of their cruiser. I had the urge to run.

"So where all you Southerners come from?" Sheila asked Thalia after we'd ordered.

"Only Nacky and one of the others, Braughm, are from the South. They're both out of Nashville. We all go to this private school called Reese on Staten Island. Most of the kids there are rich and have what they call social-behavior problems."

"But all his friends dress like cowboys," I said.

"They just wanna be like him," Thalia said with a twist to her lips. I remember thinking that if she was Caribbean she would have sucked a tooth.

"So you're rich?" Sheila asked Thalia as if it was some kind of indictment.

"No. My mother teaches there and she didn't like the kind of friends I had in public school. I like your hair. I wish I could do something like that with mine."

Sheila had thick corded braids that flowed down her back. She was a beautiful girl. She

snapped the picture with her cell phone camera. Billy left with Thalia and Sheila gave me a few friendly kisses before I walked her home.

...

The next morning Thalia and Billy met us at the gate of the police stables—they were both wearing the same clothes from the day before.

I had problems keeping up with my horse. I was just bouncing, bouncing—up and down, to the side and almost to the ground once or twice—but we had a good time. The girls became friends and Billy was glad that we were there together.

"You know, Felix," he said to me when we were returning the big animals to their stalls, "I realized yesterday that there are good people everywhere—not only in the place you come from."

Like every other citizen of the world with a cell phone, Sheila was an amateur photographer. She took pictures of us on our horses, out in the park and of me, Billy and Thalia

She had a black eye and bloody lip, and she seemed to be in the middle of a scream or a cry.

"Flip it," Sheila said.

There were seven pictures. It became obvious after the second shot that Thalia was being beaten while someone took pictures. In two shots someone was pulling her hair and slapping her. In another photo she was hunched over clutching her stomach with both hands as if someone had kicked her.

"Who sent you these?" I asked Sheila.

"It came from her phone. There was a text too."

The text read, *This is what happens to whores and race traitors.*

...

As his tutor I went to Billy's house almost every afternoon. That day we were putting the finishing touches on his poetry paper. Billy wrote on an old Royal typewriter.

"I don't really care for computers," he said. But I think he was just afraid of them.



The night before, he'd finished the fifth rewrite of the essay. He really did have deep insights into poetry written by people who turned their lives into verse. We did a word-by-word examination of his spelling and grammar before I dared to broach the thing that was foremost in my mind.

"I need to show you something, Billy."

"What's that, Felix? You don't think that the paper's good enough?"

I located the forwarded files from Sheila's phone and showed him the pictures. Billy swiped through them saying not a word. His eyes seemed to get smaller but he wasn't squinting. If he drew a breath I couldn't tell.

After some minutes and close perusal of the photos, Billy said, "Can you send this mother-fucker a note?"

Playground above 150 on the Hudson. Midnight tonight. Come ready. Come heavy.

Billy strapped on the pistol in his bedroom. It was exactly as he had done at Lazarus House but this time he tied the holster to his left leg.

"I thought you were right-handed," I said.

"Two-handed," Billy said, showing the first smile since he had seen the photos. "But I'm a little better with my left."

At 11:35 he donned an off-white trench coat and we left the house.

"Where you goin'?" Billy's mother said from the kitchen table, where she was drinking tea and watching TV.

"Over to Felix's," said my friend. "He's gonna help me type my paper into his computer so then I can send the file to Miss Andrews."

Outside we hailed a green cab and had her take us to the park.

Nacogdoches Early and his posse were waiting for us. Thalia was with them but as soon as we appeared she ran to us. Her face was swollen from the punishment she'd received.

"That's right," Nacogdoches said. "Go on over to them. That's where you belong."

A few moments later Sheila, Tom Tellerman and Teriq Strickland walked into the empty children's playground. I had called Sheila and she notified our other friends.

Nacogdoches was wearing a bright-colored Mexican poncho that he flung off. Underneath he was wearing his brown holster and black gun. He was hatless and his pale skin shone in the shadowy light.

Billy took off his trench coat and draped it around Thalia's shoulders. Sheila was holding the scared white girl by then.

There was no need for words. Billy and Nacogdoches squared off with about 10 paces between them.

"Thalia?" Billy called.

"Yeah?" she said.

"You strong enough to count to three, honey?"

Thalia walked to the river side of the two cowboys. The rest of us, white and black, moved out of the line of fire.

"One," Thalia said and I was reminded of the sense of fate I'd experienced at Lazarus House.

"Two," she announced, and I wanted to scream.

Before she was able to say the last number Nacogdoches reached for his pistol. He pulled out the gun and fired. But before that, with snake-like fluidity, Billy drew and shot. Nacogdoches's bullet went wild, landing, I believe, somewhere out on the Hudson. The young white man was dead before he hit the concrete. I remember that he fell on a chalk-drawn hopscotch design.

There was another shot and I looked to see Braughm, the other Southerner, aiming a pistol at Billy—who was now down on one knee. Billy shot once, hitting his assailant in the upper thigh. Two others of Nacogdoches's posse had guns, but Billy shot both of them before they could fire—one in the shins and the other in the shoulder.

After that we all ran.

...

At a coffee shop on 125th Street Billy was again wearing his trench coat and drinking from a bowl of chicken noodle soup. Sheila and Thalia were with us.

"You think he's dead?" Billy asked me.

"You hit him in the head."

Billy nodded and grimaced.

"It ain't no fun when somebody dies," he said.

After a few minutes of silence I noticed a red spot at the right shoulder of his off-white coat.

"You're bleeding."

"I think I need to get out of town," he said.

"I'll go with you," Thalia offered.

"That'd be nice," Billy said kindly, "but with all them bruises we'd be stopped before the train made it out of Penn Station."

Sheila's aunt and uncle were out of town, so we cleaned and dressed Billy's wound at their place. The bullet had come in through the front and gone out the back of Billy's shoulder.

"Lucky that Braughm had steel-jacketed slugs," Billy said. "A soft bullet woulda tore me up."

I went with my friend to Penn Station and waited with him for a train headed to Atlanta. I was worried that there might be some internal bleeding but Billy said he felt good and strong.

"I never wanted to live up here anyway," he said.

"What do you want me to tell your mom?"

"I'll write her, don't you worry about that. If she calls, tell her I left your place just before midnight and you don't know where I went."

He boarded the 5:11 A.M. train and that was the last I saw of him. But his effects lingered for some time.

The police found Nacogdoches Early and followed the bloody trail back to his friends. All they knew was that there was some black kid named Billy who killed Nacogdoches in a gunfight. The cops got to my brother but he was no help, saying truthfully that he'd made the

Lazarus deal with some kid named Billy but never knew where he'd come from.

Thalia told them about the beating but she'd tossed her phone and the cops never followed the electronic trail.

The three major newspapers loved the romance of a shoot-out on the Hudson. In the weeks that followed there were 17 Western-style gunfights across the city—black, white and brown would-be gunslingers dueling. No one was killed, but the mayor and the chief of police ratcheted up the stop-and-frisk program until even rich people started to complain. It all died down within six months' time. Billy's mother left Harlem, and I graduated a year early.

...

I was in my fourth year at Harvard, majoring in English literature with an emphasis on Yeats, when I received an unopened letter forwarded to me by my sister.

Dear Felix,

Over the years I have meant to write to you but was always on the move, and whenever I started the words didn't add up to much. I am very sorry for what I did when you knew me back then. There was no excuse for what Nacogdoches Early did to Thalia, but that didn't give me the right to take his life. Maybe if it had been a fair fight, maybe if I didn't know I could beat him, it would have been all right. But I knew I was the better gunman and so what I did was murder.

I have spent my time since then in the country, from Montana to Northern California, riding horses and taking work as I find it. I see my mother from time to time. She moved back to Texas after Henry Ryder died and she didn't have to be afraid of him anymore.

You were a good friend, Felix, and I appreciate you sticking by me even though you could have got in trouble too.

Maybe you should burn this letter after you read it. Whatever you do I'll be writing again. Maybe one day we'll even see each other in Times Square, or maybe on the Hudson.

Your friend, Billy

...

I haven't burned Billy's confession—not yet. I keep meaning to.

In the years since I have received 11 more letters from the Harlem Cowboy. In the last few he's written some very nice poetry about nature and manhood. His words mean a lot to me. His convictions about right and wrong give me the strength to not see myself as a victim.

I got my Ph.D. from Harvard and now teach American literature at the University of Texas. In Billy's most recent letter he said that a girlfriend googled me and found out that I now lived in the Lone Star state.

"Don't be too surprised if I drop by your classroom one day, professor," he wrote. "In a long life you only get a few friends, and that's all she wrote." ■

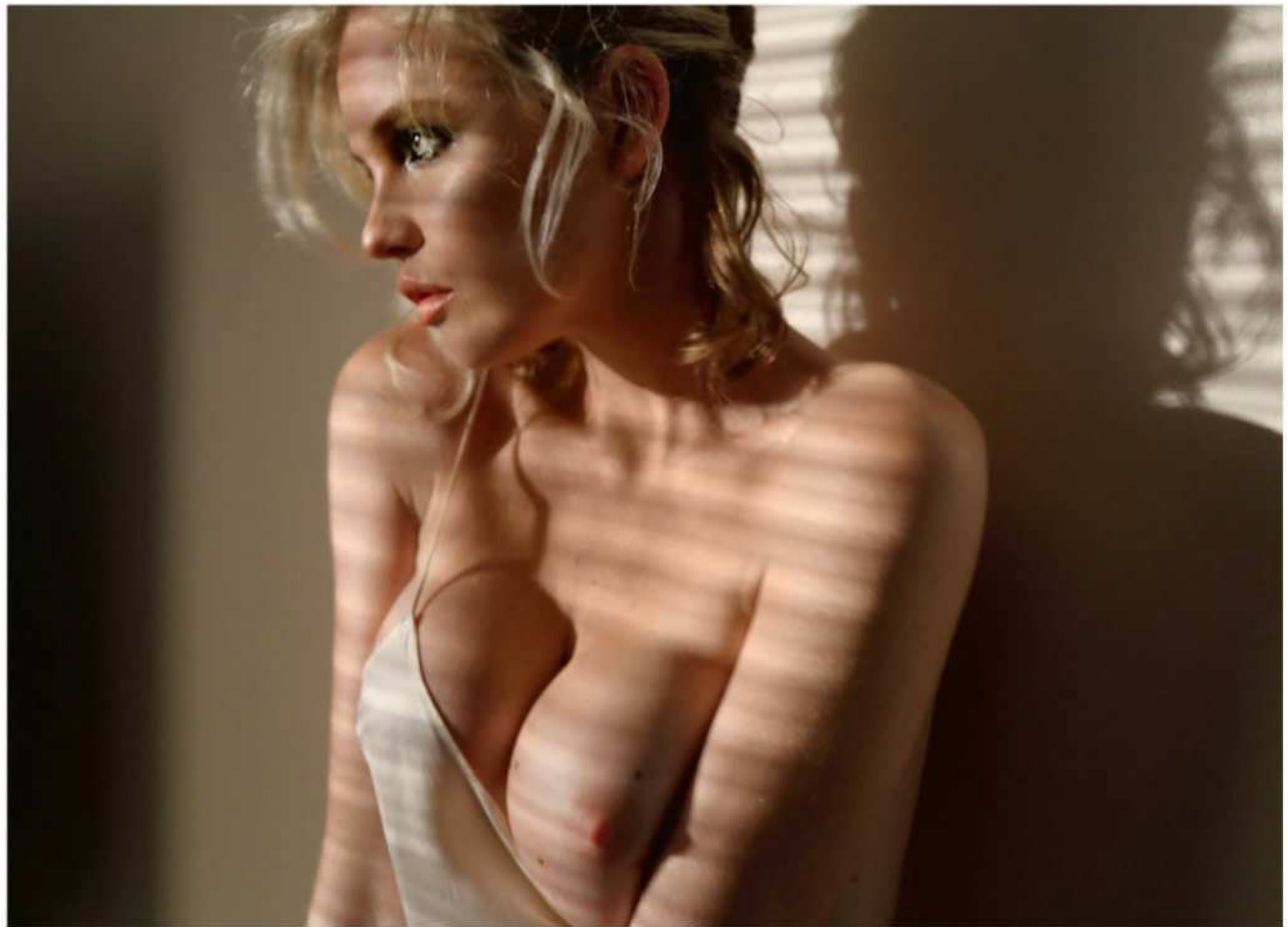


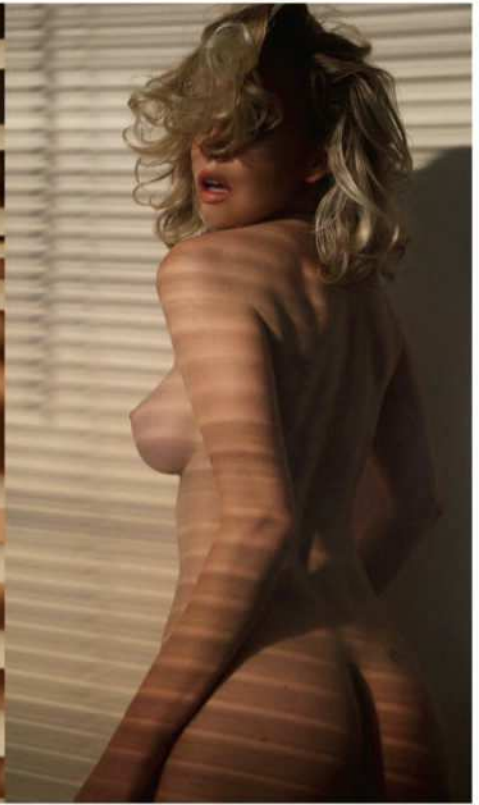
BASIC

February 2015 Playmate **Kayslee Collins** is a neo-noir femme fatale

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ALEXA KING

INSTINCT

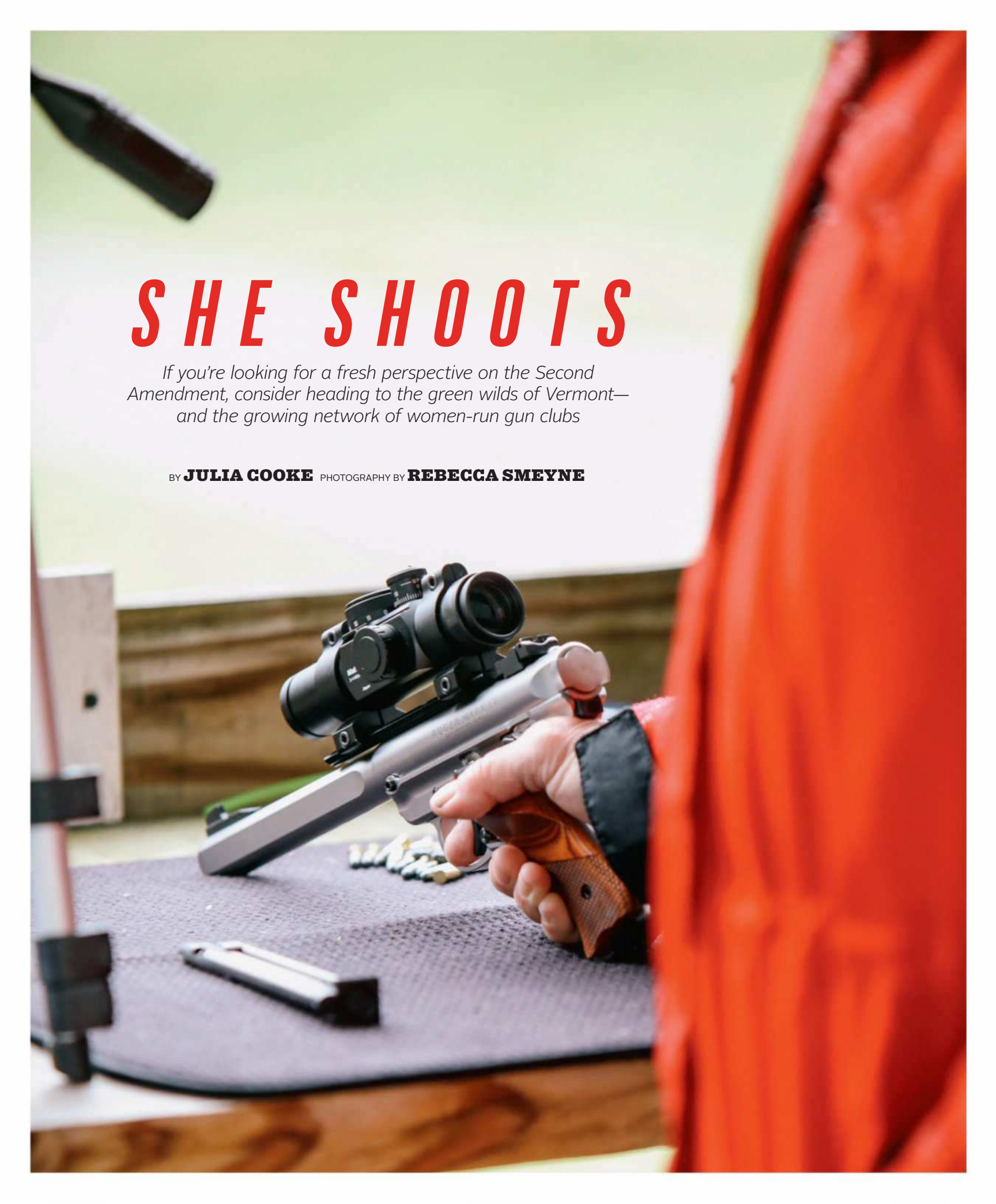










A photograph of a person wearing an orange jacket, holding a silver handgun with a large scope. The person is positioned on the right side of the frame, with their arm extended towards the center. The handgun is resting on a dark, textured surface, possibly a shooting mat. In the background, there is a wooden wall and a green target. The overall scene is set in a shooting range.

S H E S H O O T S

If you're looking for a fresh perspective on the Second Amendment, consider heading to the green wilds of Vermont—and the growing network of women-run gun clubs

BY **JULIA COOKE** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **REBECCA SMEYNE**



Five years ago, Ellen Jareckie found a dying raccoon in the back of her garage. He lay on her dog's bed, and he was enormous. The game warden wouldn't be able to make it to the house for a day or two.

The inability to ease an animal's suffering was unusual for Jareckie, who had a state wildlife-rehabilitation permit and who'd nursed pigeons, mice and once a great blue heron back to health. She couldn't bring herself to smack the raccoon over the head with a two-by-four. She also couldn't touch him for fear of rabies. Maybe her brother had a point, she thought: "Get a gun," he'd long suggested. Jareckie, a self-employed painter who lives in the rambling arcadia of Vermont, initially had no interest. But she often encountered sick and dying animals that needed to be safely euthanized. She bought a handgun and a fireproof safe, and she signed up for a basic pistol course.

Three years after she'd come upon the raccoon, she met Marsha Thompson. They'd both gotten involved with the local branch of the National Rifle Association's Women on Target training program. Women who'd taken the course began to volunteer to train others, and in 2016 Thompson took the reins of the Vermont division. Her course became the first of its kind nationwide: firearms training exclusively for women, taught exclusively by women.

Women are the fastest-growing demographic inside the NRA. Both inside the organization and around it, training courses, blogs, podcasts and product ranges are aimed at women, featuring taglines such as "Where the Feminine and Firearms Meet" and "Where Style and Self-Reliance Coexist."

"A lot of women haven't found a safe space—*safe* being a strange word to use—where they can learn to shoot and not deal with men's egos," Thompson, a 39-year Army veteran, told me when I called to ask her for some shooting instruction. I'd visited a backyard range once before and enjoyed it; this time, I wanted to learn what the experience would be like with no men involved. I also wanted to understand what Thompson and Jareckie and their team had activated up in Vermont—and how the conversation around guns might differ among their cohort.

In the post-Parkland debate over gun legislation, women's voices have grown louder across the political spectrum. Picture moth-

ers lobbying for the freedom to send their kids to school with neither fear nor bulletproof backpacks while speakers at the Conservative Political Action Conference call gun rights a feminist issue and NRA spokeswoman Dana Loesch tells a CNN town hall that packing a gun keeps a woman safe from rape. In Vermont, the stakes were suddenly high: As the state moved toward passing a raft of gun laws in April, hundreds of protestors lined up at the state capitol days before their passage to collect 1,200 30-round magazines for AR-15 and M4 weapons, donated in protest by a firearms-accessory manufacturer.

...

The April morning I drive to Marsha Thompson's farm is a stark Vermont idiosyncrasy. A



Ellen Jareckie and Marsha Thompson.

light whisking of snow, a scrim of ice at the river's edge, morning sun bright and warm by eight A.M. but the air still well below freezing. Thompson lives on 43 acres with an impressive array of animals: horses and chickens, a Rottweiler named Zeldi and a bulldog named Winston.

When Thompson joined the Army in 1973, the women wore skirts and weren't permitted to shoot guns. Over the course of her career, she became an instructor, earned a science degree, entered the reserve and worked for the state as a land surveyor. By the time she'd retired from both Army and state jobs 39 years later, Thompson had spent a decade as the only female marksmanship instructor in Vermont.

After retirement, she started to go to the

firing range with the Burlington Rifle & Pistol Club "for the camaraderie and the fun and all that kind of stuff," she tells me as we sit in the living room of her 200-year-old farmhouse. Pastoral murals on the walls, painted by her partner, pull the countryside indoors.

At the range, teaching civilians was both natural and unanticipated as she practiced for competitive matches. "I had women coming up to me because I seemed to know what I was doing, I guess, and asking where they could get training," she says. "They didn't want to get training from the men, particularly." Men got competitive. Men—the fear of assault or an aggressive ex—were the reason many women wanted to learn to shoot in the first place. That Thompson is calm and matter-of-fact, with a face that appears impassive even when it cracks into a smile and then just as quickly out of it, probably helped.

In a yellow field behind her house she sets out three guns: a Ruger compact .22, a .38 revolver and a .45. She explains how the size and shape of each firearm will feel different in my hand before setting it in my palm and tells me how each will feel to shoot: heavier and lighter, more and less kick. Load a magazine like so. Never, ever point a gun at a human I'm not prepared to shoot. Push with my right hand and pull with my left. Thumb down, hips squared, shoulders relaxed. After squeezing through the five shots in the magazine and emptying the chamber, slide a bright yellow piece of plastic through the chamber and barrel.

We don't speak much as we shoot. I like the quiet between blasts, the technical challenge, the way it makes me conscious of my muscles, my breathing and my surroundings. I miss the target on four of my five first shots, but by the end of our session, Thompson's easy interjections help me invert the ratio.

"Most girls are good at shooting," she says as we walk back from the target on our last round. "They have more attention to detail; there's less ego. They're always thinking about what's going on around them."

Attendees at Thompson's courses have ranged in age from 12 to 82. They've been motivated by wildlife rescue, safety concerns, curiosity and the desire to learn more about a specific kind of firearm. Some have said their



husbands wanted them to learn to handle a gun; others have told Thompson that their husbands thought they were out shopping. Only about a quarter have wound up buying a gun. Fine by her—Thompson is about knowledge, not purchasing power. Though she remains a staunch NRA supporter, she rankled at some of the organization's tactics when she worked with the Women on Target program. How they were “always pushing product” and online courses versus hands-on practice guided by knowledgeable instructors. The NRA didn't like small clinics, which Thompson didn't understand; the association didn't approve of the army pants she wore either.

Last year, Thompson and Jareckie and a number of the other women involved in the

got flack during the 2016 presidential primary from Hillary Clinton about his relatively pro-gun platform. Conservative commentators have called the state “safe, happy and armed to the teeth.” Which isn't entirely true, especially for women—Vermont also has startlingly high statistics for domestic violence. More than 60 percent of violent crime in the state takes place in the home.

Among the one in five American females who own guns, self-protection is the most commonly cited reason for keeping firearms. But whether owning a gun makes a person any safer is a matter of debate. According to the National Institutes of Health, armed individuals are 4.5 times more likely to be shot in an assault than those not in possession of a gun. Statistics may

abled people in the U.S. are three times more likely than the general population to be victims of violent crime.

She purchased a gun six years ago at the age of 30. She's usually the only woman at her local South Carolina range, logging her practice hours. “I've never had to use my firearm,” she tells me, “but then I wonder about the question, because it almost feels like I use it every single day of my life by default of it being in my house, loaded, no safety, ready to go.”

Feeling safe can shape how a woman understands the world and her place in it: Jareckie and the wildlife she loves; Thompson and her competence in a male field; Weise and how the world perceives her vulnerability. Most of these women are aware that feeling safe is not the

“MOST GIRLS ARE GOOD AT SHOOTING. THEY'RE ALWAYS



Vermont Women on Target clinics split from the NRA to found the nonprofit Vermont Women's Shooting Association. Thompson asked local fish and game clubs if they'd serve as hosts, and they eagerly agreed. Thompson built benches and target frames, Jareckie designed a logo, and they started advertising. Over the summer, 27 women attended eight beginner and intermediate clinics. Thompson's goal was education, but she wouldn't complain if she could get a few more women to be competitors.

Bureaucracy appropriate to a national organization seemed at odds with Vermont, a state whose culture defies easy stereotyping. Vermont is rural and among the least populous in the nation. It's the only state where high gun ownership statistics do not correlate directly with national voting trends. Independent senator Bernie Sanders, reelected with more than 70 percent of the vote in 2012,

not bear out the assertion that a gun makes the human who holds or owns it safer from crime, but for the women with whom I spoke—all of whom have gone through extensive firearm training, practice target shooting regularly and said they wouldn't have bought a gun if they weren't deeply confident in their ability to use it safely and effectively—a firearm certainly makes them *feel* safer.

“There was a 180 in my emotional landscape when it came to ‘Oh my gosh, I'm in my house and I have nothing but a flashlight to protect me’ versus ‘I'm in my house with a loaded gun,’” says poet and professor Jillian Weise. She tends not to talk about guns in her circles, though I'd read her lucid writing on guns in the literary review *Tin House*. But she often finds her perspective absent from the national dialogue: Weise is female and small, and she has one leg made of flesh and one prosthetic. Dis-

same as *being* safe. But for now, I hear beneath their words, it's what they've got.

...

The air has warmed to a balmy 40 degrees two days later, on April 11, the day Governor Phil Scott signs Vermont's new gun laws. Scott has arranged for a public signing on the Montpelier capitol steps. The move feels like a benediction granted to his most vocal critics and supporters, or at least those who have the luxury of showing up at two P.M. on a Wednesday.

The day after the Parkland shooting, Governor Scott, a Republican, pledged not to change the state's lack of restrictions on firearms. But then police picked up a Vermont 18-year-old whose journal laid out plans for a school shooting in tiny Fair Haven. He'd bought a shotgun and four boxes of ammunition. “I will gear up and let loose my anger and hatred. It'll be fantastic,” he'd written.



“Everything should be on the table at this point,” Scott said shortly after. Within two months, three new gun-control bills were drawn up and approved. They allow police to remove guns from people considered a risk and those with domestic-assault citations, ban bump stocks and high-capacity handgun magazines, raise the legal purchasing age to 21 and require universal background checks.

Party lines did not hold as state legislators voted on the bills. Some lawmakers took issue with the difficulty of enforcing the high-capacity magazine ban, which places restrictions on magazines sold or possessed in the state after October 1, 2018. Others had problems with the age limit; in a state with steep income inequality, some families teach their

wear stickers that read, DON’T NEW YORK MY VERMONT GUN RIGHTS.

Few women have come to protest the bills. I speak with a voluble, warm, middle-aged woman named Lorraine who tells me she thinks armed guards will do more than legal restrictions to dispel school shooters. As we speak, her husband pushes between us. “If you’re talking to her, you’re talking to me too,” he says. She shoots him a look and keeps talking.

A woman named Elizabeth tells me she’s been the victim of domestic abuse. After she’d disentangled herself from the abusive ex, she bought a gun. She supports the ban on bump stocks but not the age restrictions. Nearby, a handsome 40-ish man named Eli says he’s at the capitol for a variety of reasons. “I believe

ing on where you look, the study points out, estimates of defensive firearm use range from 108,000 to 3 million instances each year. “The lack of comprehensive data sets and...the fact that the data lead to contradictory conclusions call into question the reliability and validity of gun-violence data,” write the authors.

In the absence of reliable statistics, it begins to seem like feelings are what men are talking about too.

...

To discuss guns with responsible, thoughtful people who own them is to invite flamboyant suggestions and sensitive observations. In the course of reporting this story, I’ve heard a male gun owner propose that all fellow owners should be legally liable for whatever their

THINKING ABOUT WHAT’S GOING ON AROUND THEM.”



tweens to hunt to help put food on the table. “It drove the leadership crazy,” Representative Susan Buckholz had told me earlier. Now, in Montpelier, we walk together toward the gold-domed capitol and the signing.

A few hundred Vermonters have amassed on either side of the capitol steps, with journalists scurrying between camps of protestors and supporters of the new legislation. THANK YOU, GOV. SCOTT, declares a sign on one side. THIS IS WHAT A HERO LOOKS LIKE.

On the other side of the steps, hunters’ orange pops against the gray of stone and sky. NON LAW-ABIDING CITIZENS DO NOT FOLLOW THE GUN LAWS, reads one sign. MY RIGHTS DON’T END WHERE YOUR FEELINGS AND MISCONCEPTIONS BEGIN! reads another. Underneath, in small letters, MVGA (Make Vermont Great Again). To these citizens, Scott is, in their words, a traitor, a liar, a pansy. Many

that self-defense is a basic human right. Also I have a daughter who’s almost seven and I’m very, very concerned about the direction that these things are going,” he says. “When she gets older and she’s out on her own, especially when she’s very young, just starting out, she may not be able to afford the best housing or things like that. I want to make sure that she’s still able to protect herself.”

“With a gun?” I ask.

“Yes, with a gun,” he says. “Because a recent CDC study has shown that guns are the best way to defend yourself, that you have the least likely risk of getting injured yourself in your own self-defense. You can look that up.”

The study in question is called “Priorities for Research to Reduce the Threat of Firearm-Related Violence.” Released in 2013, it’s actually about the lack of reliable research on the risks and rewards of gun ownership. Depend-

firearm does. I’ve heard a female gun owner suggest that men have proven themselves unworthy of the technology, so only women should be able to own guns, which should be issued—along with a year’s worth of training and a driver’s license—upon a young woman’s 16th birthday. I’ve heard an avid hunter, the father of a toddler who will grow into a gun-proficient woman, refer to his ambivalence toward the “ersatz masculinity” of gun aficionados of both genders.

Although Representative Buckholz and her husband own guns, they didn’t store them at home when her now-grown son lived with them. These days, Buckholz has been logging hours at the range; at the age of 61, she has a stalker. She tells me she isn’t sure what she’ll do if he shows up on her front step. Feeling safe not only means different things to different people but can shift with changing circumstances.



Preceding pages and above: Scenes from the 2018 Vermont State Rifle & Pistol Association's outdoor spring tournament in Jericho. Both Jareckie and Thompson competed.

As my interviews wrap up, a number of women point out to me that they identify as political independents. “I’m not a Trump supporter,” one says. “I tend to vote down the middle,” Jareckie tells me. In this they are indicative of a national trend, especially where gun laws are concerned. In a 2017 Pew Research Center study, six in 10 Republican and Republican-leaning female gun owners reported favoring a ban on assault-style weapons and creating a federal government database to track gun sales, as compared with about a third of their male counterparts. Nearly 90 percent of the same group of women favored barring gun purchases by the mentally ill and people on no-fly lists, as well as background checks for private sales.

Over and over, in every interview with a female gun owner, legislator or activist, a single word comes up: *fear*. The right to live unafraid; the fear of losing rights. Male fear, female fear; true fear, manipulated fear; fear of the hypothetical and the tangible.

“We’re scared shitless in this country right now. I can’t remember a time that I’ve ever felt everything to be so destabilized,” says Buckholz. “We’re allowed to be afraid as women. Encouraged, supported in it. But if you are a white male, you’re not supposed to be afraid. You’re supposed to be in charge. And you’re terrified.”

Given room to breathe, fear can flourish into dialogue, another state legislator points out to me. “Women come to this conversation having lived our lives physically, literally vulner-

able, and knowing that that is a normal state of being,” Sarah Copeland-Hanzas tells me as we sit inside Vermont’s capitol building. “So we’re willing to have conversations—how do you balance someone’s need to protect themselves with society’s need to defend against the errant or the crazy or the temporarily insane?”

And fear plus a firearm equals scenarios that can and do go tragically wrong based on an unpredictable matrix of reality, anxiety and bias. That same April week in Michigan, a white homeowner shot at a 14-year-old black boy who’d knocked on his door to ask directions to the high school after he’d missed his bus. Black Americans are the victims of more than half of all gun-related homicides, though they constitute only 14 percent of the national population.

• • •

A few days after our first shooting lesson, I meet Thompson and Jareckie for target practice with the Burlington Rifle & Pistol Club at the National Guard’s Camp Ethan Allen Training Site. As we set up, my target flanked by theirs, discussion whirls around us about Vermont’s new gun rules and regulations. I overhear one man telling a trio that the 17 state senators who voted “against your Second Amendment rights” were transplants from out of state. “Flatlanders,” they’re called here.

We begin to shoot. At first, the sensations—the unfamiliar *rat-a-tat* of many bullets in tandem, the sudden scent of gunpowder—unmoor me. I am no longer one person on a bucolic

backyard range. When I set my gun down, I forget to thread the empty-chamber indicator through the gun. Jareckie reaches silently into my range of vision and does it for me. “Remember to push and pull,” Thompson says coolly. Before long, I am immersed in the challenge, silent and focused. Having fun.

“You think you’d ever want to carry?” one of the men nearby asks me at the end of the session.

“I very much doubt it,” I say.

“I’ll give you three months before you change your mind,” he says with a chuckle.

This is the fundamental difference, I suddenly understand, between shooting guns with men, or white men, at least, and women. Women have skin in the game—our vulnerable bodies—and yet few gendered expectations around our expertise with or enthusiasm for the technology in our hands. The result is a conversation that can

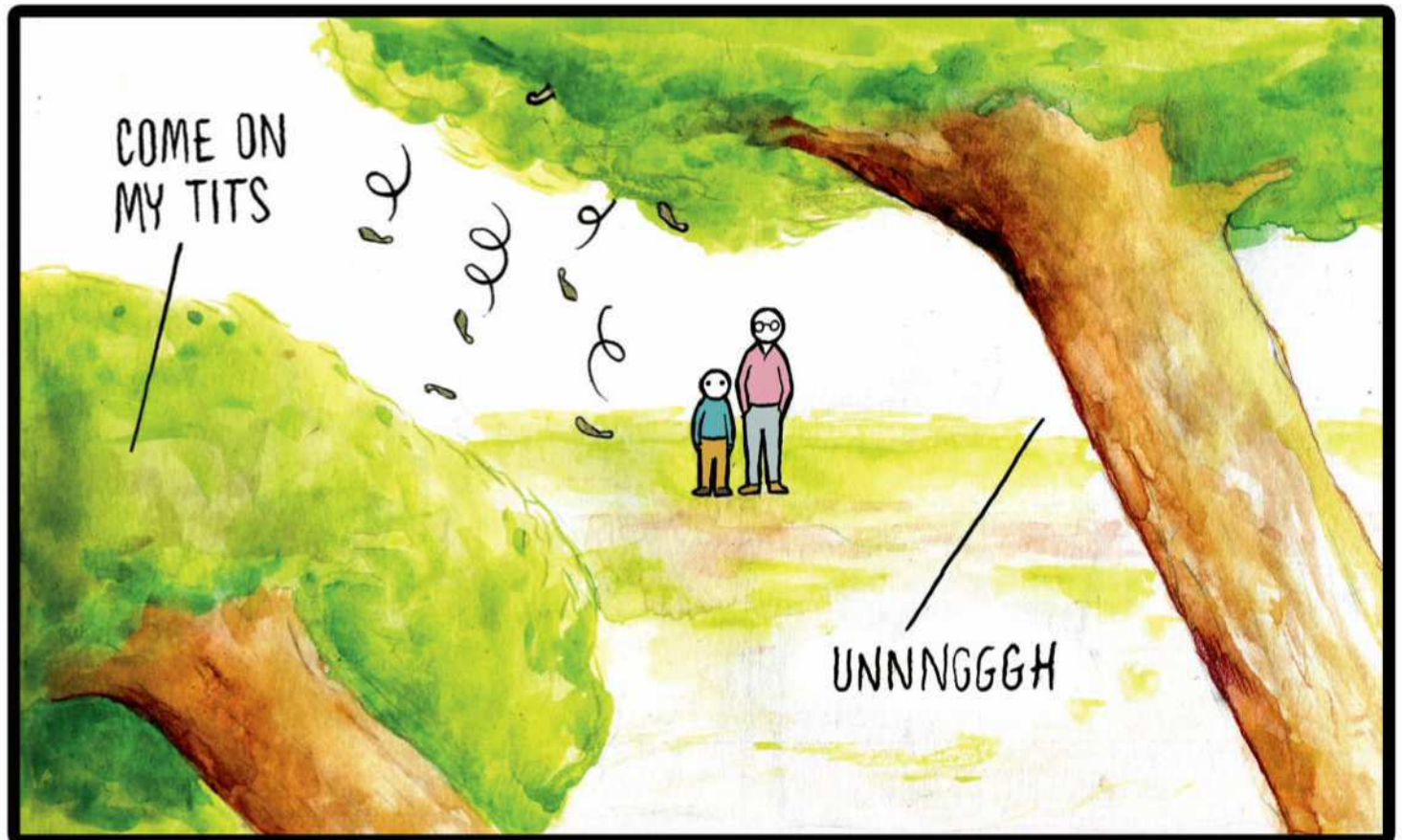
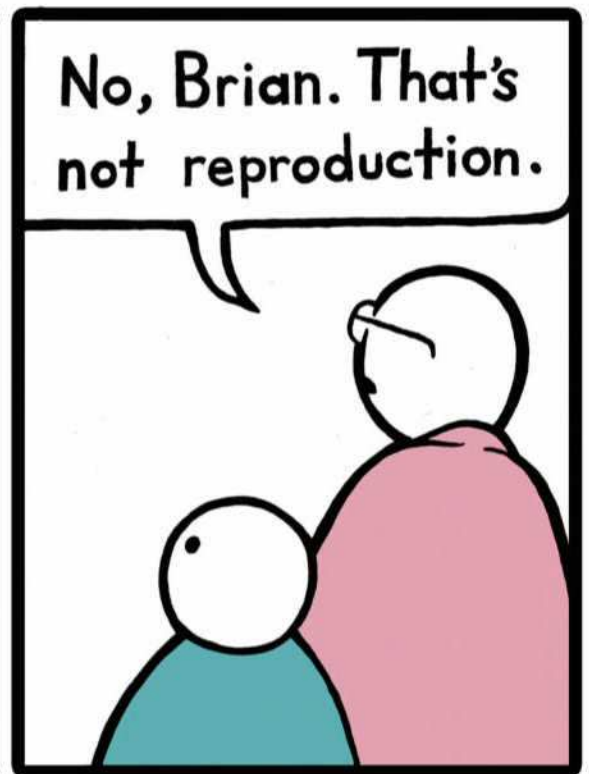
center, at its best, on technologies and their capabilities, actions and their consequences. A group of Americans, as Copeland-Hanzas implied, uniquely qualified to lead the way on an issue riddled with fear and misinformation.

An examination later that day of the biographies and voting records of Vermont state senators revealed no correlation between state of birth and yea or nay votes on the new gun laws. Still, even on the left, some were wary of a triumphal tone about the gun laws’ passage. “Everyone’s feeling like we’ve done something great here,” Buckholz, a Democrat, had told me before warning that some related challenges—Vermont’s mental health facilities, the socioeconomic and cultural polarities of a proudly rural state—had gone exactly nowhere.

Her caution was appropriate. Before the end of April, gun-rights groups had filed a constitutional challenge to the magazine ban.

Thompson, meanwhile, was busy firming up her summer plans. She hoped to add a defensive clinic to the lineup, since so many women last year had requested one. The year’s first beginner clinic, in May, had attracted 17 sign-ups in three days. The event represented a step up: bigger numbers, sponsored by the Vermont State Rifle & Pistol Association, at the National Guard range. She’d opened the attendance to both genders—three men and three boys had signed up—and enlisted a few guys from the pistol club to help oversee the large group.

But the women were in charge. ■





PLAYMATE



HI, PRIESTESS

*Meet the sultry—and psychic—**Lorena Medina**, our August Playmate.
She might just inspire a spiritual awakening*

Rebel. Survivor. Wild child. Lorena Medina is all of this and more.

A bundle of energy with a lilting voice and a sparkling, hypnotic gaze, Lorena is living her dream—but as in all fairy tales, a difficult past was the prelude. “It was like Cinderella, or a telenovela,” says the Mexico City native (who apparently is a Playmate *and* a poet). “Both my parents passed away when I was 16, so I had to figure things out on my own. I got a fake ID and started go-go dancing in clubs. I did what I had to do to survive.”

In 2013 Lorena moved to Los Angeles. “I was a bottle-service girl at a place in Hermosa Beach, and a woman came up to me with her business card. That’s when I knew I could do modeling.” Since then, her career has surged. “I guess since I was little some part of me knew I was going to be something,” she says, adding that the chance encounter at her old job

“was a reminder I have a bit of star in me.” In addition to her modeling gigs—including an immensely popular cowgirl pictorial in the January/February issue of this magazine—Lorena has been logging a lot of time in recording studios. “I’ve been writing songs and learning to play piano. And I’m in a girl group! Think Spice Girls but in 2018,” she says with a giggle. Lorena is also pursuing an unusual avocation: intuitive medium. “One day a few years ago, I channeled someone with no warning,” she says. “I went to have my tarot cards read, and they told me, ‘You have a gift, and it’s very strong.’ I’d always thought it was bullshit, but suddenly a lot of things made sense.”

Whether Lorena is channeling vibrations or creating her own, her passion is palpable. A rising star, indeed.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CHRISTOPHER VON STEINBACH**



















"Last night, Granny read your manuscript. She thinks it needs more sex."



AUGUST 2018

PLAYBOY'S PLAYMATE OF THE MONTH





DATA SHEET



BIRTHPLACE: Mexico City, Mexico **CURRENT CITY:** Los Angeles, California

CALL HER CLAIRVOYANT

I've felt weirdly in tune with things since I was a kid. When I do readings, I open myself up and ask permission. But when it comes to channeling something, you just never know, because it's not you; it's another energy. I didn't used to believe in all this, but now I do. It has been intense to process. I wish I knew how to control it, but it's not something you can control.

CONFIDENCE GAME

I love myself and I project that. The way I carry myself is what makes me sexy—and my energy. If you love yourself and feel sexy, then you're the hottest.

ADVENTURE TIME

I'm wild in every respect. I like adventures. I like to randomly jump in someone's car and go on a trip.

If you said, "Let's go to Japan right now," I'd say, "Cool!" I don't overthink anything. I just go with it and have fun on the journey. Otherwise, you're not living; you're just waiting for something to happen.

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

I like a man who is a gentleman. He needs to be funny—and honestly, he needs to be hot. Is that bad? It sounds terrible, but I want to wake up and see something beautiful every morning!

BEST SHOT

Tequila is my favorite liquor. If you ask me what I want to drink, I will always say Don Julio 1942.

GREAT ESCAPE

I want to go backpacking with my homies for a month or two, maybe to Southeast Asia. But I don't want to go to fancy places or luxurious

hotels. I want real experiences. I want to appreciate real beauty.

SOUL SISTER

If I could collaborate with anyone, living or dead, it would be Amy Winehouse. She is my inspirational artist.

DEAL OR NO DEAL

To date me, a guy needs to be mature. If he acts like a little kid, or if he plays video games for hours, I'm not into it. And lying is a real turn-off. I'm such an open person—you can tell me *anything* and I won't get mad.

NAKED TRUTH

I love to be naked. Take it off! I've always felt comfortable with no clothes on. It's freeing, it's liberating and, most of all, it's who you are in your natural state, so why not? You should try it.


@itslorenamedina





PLAYBOY'S PARTY JOKES

Streaming your homemade sex videos to an 82-inch 4K television is a great way to make your manhood look larger than life. It's also a great way to get thrown out of Best Buy.

August is named after the emperor Augustus because he logged many of his



greatest triumphs in that month. So it seems only fair that we change the name of the 10th month of the year from October to Reggie Jackson.

Virtual-reality porn: for when you really want to know what it feels like to be in a sparsely decorated split-level house in the San Fernando Valley.

A survey of male college students revealed that 20 percent of respondents had masturbated in a classroom or library. In a related survey, 100 percent of college janitors said they want a fucking raise.

Sex is like pizza: We simply cannot agree on whether a pineapple should be involved.

WEDDING SEASON

Comedian, actor, author and former strip-club DJ Jimmy O. Yang is in the house to warm you up for the forthcoming Crazy Rich Asians movie with a few thoughts on bachelor parties:

What do you call a bachelor party with no strippers? An intervention.

To all the newlyweds: If one of you slept around the night before your wedding, don't call it cheating; just think of it as the last meal.

We couldn't afford strippers for my bachelor party, so my friends and I covered ourselves in body glitter and cheap perfume just to make our ladies jealous.

The last thing I remember from my bachelor party is taking a shot of tequila. So I'm having my honeymoon early. In Tijuana. Without my wife. In the trunk of a car.

Always invite your fiancée's brother to your bachelor party. Then make him smoke PCP like Denzel in *Training Day* so he can't implicate you in any crimes committed.

Bachelor parties are the price women pay for weddings. Weddings are the price men pay for bachelor parties.

My fiancée was crystal clear about my bachelor party: no getting screwed for money. So I said, "In that case, we're firing our wedding photographer and our caterers."

For my friend's bachelor party, we spent the weekend in Napa Valley wine tasting, antiquing and horseback riding through the vineyards. Everything was arranged by the best man, who has since been demoted to worst woman.

A groom slept with the stripper at his own bachelor party, resulting in a canceled wedding and an awful Yelp review for the stripper.

Welcome to the Backhanded Compliment Club! It's great meeting so many people who don't care how they look.

There are two types of people in this world: good ones, and the ones who text you the words *Call me*.

Strip clubs in the hipster haven of Portland, Oregon offer vegan buffets. That would explain the patrons who have been seen ducking into the restrooms to beat their meat substitute.

A female doctor has to deliver some bad news to a patient.



Ally Neiman

"I'm sorry, Mr. Levin, but you'll never have intercourse again."

Stunned, the man asks, "What is it, doctor? My prostate? An STD? Tell me!"

The doctor shakes her head. "No, no. You see, I matched with you on Tinder, and any grown man who lists Pokémon as an interest will never get laid."





20Q

Lakeith Stanfield

*With festival smash *Sorry to Bother You*, the enthralling young actor has arrived. Here, he talks aspiration, Atlanta and the truth behind his surreal Oscars cameo*

Q1: Your new movie *Sorry to Bother You* has some of the most shocking twists in recent memory. Without giving too much away, were you prepared for that when you first got the script?

STANFIELD: No one gave me any warning, which I think is a good way to go into this kind of story—straight in. Once I read it, I was like, “Oh, totally, we have to do this.” It hopped off the page. Normally, to make a movie like this you would need a multimillion-dollar budget. I don’t know what the exact numbers were, but they were pretty low. Sometimes my trailer was a van, you know what I mean? But we found a way to make it happen. We had a vision. Sometimes it’s the best working environment when everyone builds from the trenches together. You can really get on the ground and get dirty.

Q2: Your character, Cassius Green, is a telemarketer who, having learned to use his “white voice,” gets a big promotion that comes with increasingly lavish and weird perks. You’re 26 and have been acting for a decade. In your own

career, has it ever felt as though you were leaving behind the people you came up with?

STANFIELD: Yeah. When I first moved to Los Angeles, it was definitely a big shift for me. Certain people around me didn’t understand why I would be trying to pursue this weird job. I had conversations with people very similar to those Cassius has with Detroit [Cassius’s girlfriend, played by Tessa Thompson]. But it hasn’t really started feeling super weird until now. I was in L.A. recently, in my car at a stoplight, and some dude just runs up to my passenger-side window, takes a selfie and runs off. Just selfie, then gone. I was like, Yeah, that’s never happened before. Something is different.

Q3: Cassius also tells Detroit, “I’m just out here surviving, and what I’m doing right now won’t even matter.” Do you share that anxiety about leaving your mark on the world?

STANFIELD: No. Cassius wants to be remembered, to leave something behind. I think to some extent we all do, but it’s not my primary

concern. Maybe what you leave behind in your work is cool, but I wouldn’t want my work to be ascribed only to me. I’m more of a collaborator. I love family, and I love the idea of leaving things to family and having generational things that can be looked back on—history, generational wealth. But people aren’t as special as we tell ourselves. I think other things are more important than humans, personally.

Q4: Do you think it’s ultimately a hopeful movie?

STANFIELD: I do. I walk away with a sense of newfound hope, remembering what’s important to tell yourself—especially when you’re rising in terms of fame or money or anything like that. Remembering to try to stay grounded and keep good people around you who will tell you when you’re fucking up or off your square. *Sorry to Bother You* is a beautiful rags-to-riches story. I know it sounds corny, but it’s true: You can have all the things in the world and be miserable.

Q5: Were you raised in a religious household?

STANFIELD: Mm-hmm. I was raised very

BY **JAMES RICKMAN** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DANIELLE LEVITT**







I think other things are more important than humans, personally.

religious. It wasn't until I was older that I started to comprehend things differently, in a way that was sort of opposite to what I'd been taught. I went through a phase when I dropped all religion, but then I went back, thinking maybe it's some mixture in between the two. And now I just say, "I don't know." But I do like the Bible. It has a lot of real-world implications and seems to be based on some astrological things, so if you're into trying to connect to something larger than yourself, it's definitely worth a read. But try to read it outside the confines of any given religion. Read it for yourself and come up with your own conclusions.

Q6: *What denomination were you raised in?*

STANFIELD: Protestant—yeah, Protestant. Latter Day Saints, I think it's called. No. Seventh-Day Adventist! Yeah, they used to say all those words, but I never really knew what they meant. It was a strange one: baptized, drinking the blood of Jesus, eating of the flesh, whatever, and anointments and people falling on the ground, shaking and speaking in tongues. Great music. I was in the choir. Like I said, as of late I'm more in the middle of things. I definitely don't subscribe to religion, but I think there's something to be said for spirituality and finding one's footing in that place.

Q7: *Where else do you turn when you need solace or inspiration?*

STANFIELD: Music helps. I really love music. I like this compilation *XXYYXX* by *XXYYXX*. I listen to some Beethoven, some Bach every now and again, Yo-Yo Ma and shit like that. It's nice and soothing. I like Moroccan music



I was in a foreign body at the Oscars. It felt appropriate to be screaming “Get out!” at that audience.

and Black Coffee and sounds of nature. I kind of throw it around.

Q8: You recently wrote and directed a short film, *The Road*. Can you tell us about that?

STANFIELD: I wrote and shot that while I was filming the TV show *Atlanta*. It was inspired by a conversation between Donald Glover and Brian Tyree Henry about race and power and politics. I was sitting at the table with these two very smart people who were just volleying, and I was in the middle like, “Oh, shit.” It inspired me to take my friend, who worked with me on the project, and sort of make him represent some of those things. And being in Atlanta, which is a really black city, there’s this interesting aspect about race relations and things of that nature.

Q9: Do you think you’ll do more writing and directing?

STANFIELD: Oh, man, I really want to slowly but surely move into more behind-the-scenes stuff. I’m just trying to take it all in, spend some time with heroes, get out there in the field, try to learn.

Q10: You clearly have an innate ability to get in front of people and compel their attention—your career started when you jumped up on a table or chair and started air-surfing in front of an agent. Do you really want to dial back the performance part?

STANFIELD: Attention is not always that much fun. I mean, I *love* telling stories, but I don’t really like having attention on me, you know what I mean? It’s surface level. I’m more into deep connections. I love everyone who supports me, but the interaction on a fame level is just not the same and—I don’t know, it’s not for me.

Q11: You recently tweeted a question: “Do you separate artist from art?” What inspired that?

STANFIELD: Twitter is an interesting platform. I have fun interacting with people on it and wondering what the overall consensus is on questions like that. In this day and age of information and accessibility to artists, you can get more of an insight into who people are, and it gives you an opportunity to create ideas and judgments about that. Personally I think the less information I have about the artist the better, because it allows me to just enjoy the art. Sometimes those things can influence how you think. So I think it’s better to just be like, “Show the art and shut up.”

Q12: Let’s talk about *Atlanta*. In the first episode we see your character, Darius, baking cookies. Do you think Darius might pursue food as a career, or is there any particular way you see him developing in five or 10 years?

STANFIELD: I hope not, because Darius’s recipes are quite a bit stranger than one might imagine. I’m actually there in his body, cooking, so I can tell you that half the stuff he makes—I don’t know if anybody would really want to indulge in it. But you never know. I mean, if you want some pasta with Darius’s foot stuck in it—literally his foot stuck in it—then you might be interested.

Q13: Do you see anything else in his future?

STANFIELD: I never see his past or his future. Darius is always in the now. In his estimation it’s all the same: Past, present and future all exist right now. Darius is everywhere.

Q14: You first met Donald Glover at a party as a fan of his music persona, *Childish Gambino*, right?

STANFIELD: I still call him Gambino. That’s the only thing I knew! I didn’t know he was an actor. I didn’t know he was on *Community*. I didn’t really watch much TV coming up, and actually I’d only heard a couple of his freestyles. But yeah, I had heard him rap before, and I thought he was very courageous for the way





that he rapped because it felt like he was coming from the heart in a way I hadn't heard in a while. Seeing him at that party, I said, "Oh shit! Yeah, man, I know who you are." And he was like, "I think you'd be great for this role." The first thought that crossed my mind was, Wow, I must have some really fuckin' good dance moves. Because I was on the dance floor, just gettin' it by myself. I mean, I gotta hit the dance floor; it's not there for nothing. And I guess he thought I had some good moves; that's what I thought. Later I found out that he'd seen something else that I had been in and thought I might be good for Darius. But either way, in the moment I was like, "Oh shit. Cool, man, here's my info."

Q15: A lot of actors can't stand to watch themselves on the screen. Is that a problem for you?

STANFIELD: I definitely get that sense of it. I'm not that interested in looking at myself—but when I'm watching, I don't really feel like I'm watching me, funny enough. It kind of feels like I'm just watching that character,

and I'm able to do it more and more as I go on and remove myself from the equation. Right now I feel it's relatively easy, because I can let go of my relationship to the project and I can let go of the character. No matter how many times people run up to me and say, "Get out!" or ask to measure my tree, I can still develop a level of distance from the character, because I let it go.

Q16: This year's Oscars featured a memorable cameo from your *Get Out* character. When that idea was proposed to you, what was your initial reaction?

STANFIELD: That there couldn't be a better place to do something like this. Say you take an average person and plop them right in the middle of an Oscars ceremony; it's like warping them into a whole nother dimension. And I felt that way. It was my first Oscars thing. I had been to other awards ceremonies, and all of them had felt the same to me—like a strange twilight zone that you're being zoomed into. All of a sudden you're standing next to all these people with lights and cameras flashing all over, and there's sort of an underbelly, with security and people with guns taking care of jewelry. It's a strange place. So playing that character reminded me of the party scene in *Get Out*—not the sense of the racism but just feeling like I was in a new environment. So in the sense that Andre, my character in *Get Out*, was sort of taken over by something entering his body, I kind of felt like I was in a foreign body at the Oscars. It felt appropriate to be screaming "Get out!" at that audience.

Q17: After that moment, you lingered on-stage, which really cranked up the tension. Was that a conscious choice?

STANFIELD: Well, I tried to tell everyone after I got done with the "get out" thing that I was sorry to bother them, but they cut my mike. So it kind of looked like I was just standing there, and no one else knows it, but actually I said, "Sorry to bother you." No one knew I was going to do it. I didn't even know I was going to do it. It just kind of happened in the moment.

Q18: Other than *Sorry to Bother You*, do you have any upcoming projects you're particularly excited about?



STANFIELD: I just wrapped up a movie called *The Girl in the Spider's Web*, which is the next installment in the Millennium series, the first of which was *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*. I can't wait till we see a trailer for it because I think it's going to be quite the spectacle.

Q19: Is that your first big action movie?

STANFIELD: I think so, if you don't count *The Purge: Anarchy*—I don't know if that's an action movie. This time I'm right in the center of the fire. My character is attempting to track down Lisbeth Salander. I can't release many details as to why, but he's trying to track her down, and it's a fun ride watching them duke it out. It's a big, beautiful-looking film from what I've seen so far. There are some other things I won't talk about [*in a posh voice*] because I love keeping an element of *mysteria*.

Q20: Speaking of *mysteria*, last question: Do you have recurring dreams?

STANFIELD: I do, actually. One of them is a great, expansive dream where I'm flying around everywhere. That one happened a lot when I was younger and then it went away, but it's come back recently, which I think is a good sign. I feel like that dream represents some kind of exploration of freedom. I've had another recurring dream that isn't so good, about being pursued by law enforcement for some reason. That dream started surfacing after I did the movie *Crown Heights*. Now it seems to be dissipating, which is great, because I don't like those dreams. I'd much rather be flying. ■





PLAYBOY PROFILE

DR. JORDAN PETERSON MAKES HIS ROUNDS

*Since when do Canadian professors dominate YouTube and incite protests?
On the road with one of the most controversial thinkers of our time*

When I arrive on a Sunday morning at the discreet, upscale Manhattan residential hotel where Jordan B. Peterson is staying, I'm relieved to find no trace of anti-Peterson forces.

Lately he's been attracting fervent protesters, and at least one of his public appearances this year has been marred by low-level violence.

The 55-year-old Canadian clinical psychologist and University of Toronto psychology professor is in New York to headline the Beacon Theatre, a 2,894-seat neo-Grecian beauty on the Upper West Side. Tonight he'll take the stage in front of a sold-out house of fans who have paid upward of \$50 for the privilege. This will be the kickoff of the U.S. leg of his 12 Rules for Life tour, in support of his book of the same name. Since its release in January by Random House, *12 Rules* has gone on to top U.S. and various international best-seller charts. As the title suggests, it's a

self-help book—but a wide-ranging intellectual romp of a self-help book that capitalizes on Peterson's unlikely internet fame: In the five years since he started his own YouTube channel, videos of his lectures have racked up more than 50 million views.

The first thing I ask Peterson, as we sit down to talk in a perfectly appointed private lounge, is how much he worries about protesters. It's only 11 A.M., but he's already in an elegant suit and tie.

"First of all," he says, "what are you going to do? I don't believe that enhancing security makes you more secure. I think that if you set the stage, if you walk around with bodyguards, you look like a target. And so I'm not doing that."

What Peterson is not willing to do is part of what has made him so famous—despised in some quarters, beloved in others.

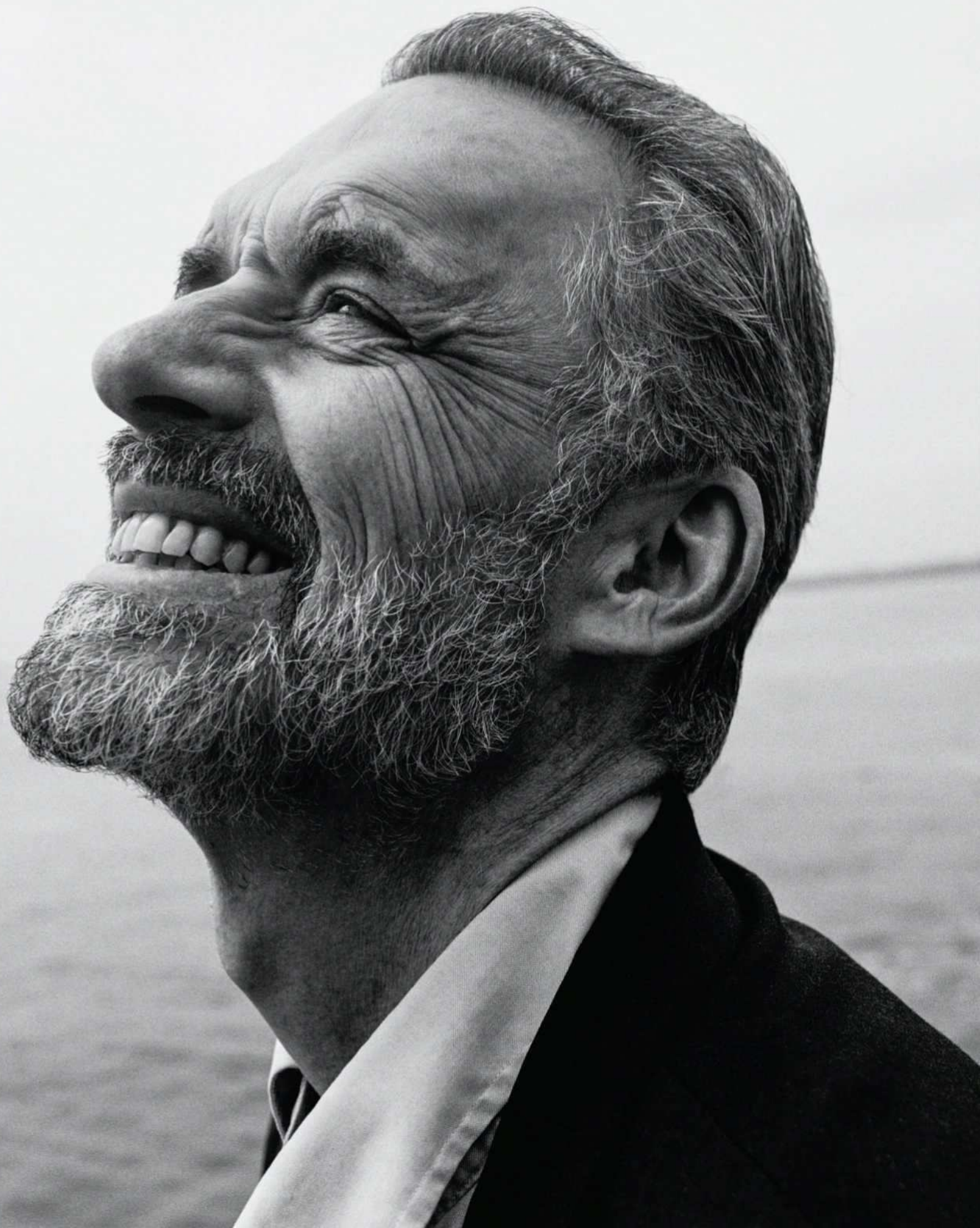
One of his more notorious refusals involves Bill C-16, a.k.a. An Act to Amend the

Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code, which was introduced by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's administration and became law in June 2017. Although C-16 is rather vaguely worded in its attempt to advance protections for transgender people, the Ontario Human Rights Commission's interpretation of the law is that "refusing to refer to a trans person by their chosen name and a personal pronoun that matches their gender identity" or otherwise "purposely misgendering" would "likely be discrimination," and thus illegal.

Peterson regards the "misgendering" provision of C-16 as state-mandated "compelled speech" and a wedge-issue victory for so-called social-justice warriors—a pejorative for "identity politics" activists.

C-16, Peterson says, "was much, much more ideologically toxic than it appeared on the surface, which I knew because I read all the policy documents." For instance, he says, "the

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JAKE CHESSUM**





“WE KNOW THE LEFT CAN GO TOO FAR, BUT WE DON’T KNOW *WHEN*.”

social-justice tribunals in Ontario are exempt from jurisprudential precedent. If you have any sense, that leaves you *speechless*.”

“The Ontario government,” he continues, “is completely run by social-justice types.” (Ottawa, the capital city of Canada, is located in the province of Ontario.) “These people are hell-bent to infiltrate organizations of every sort regardless of the traditions and history of the institution. And our current prime minister, Trudeau, is weak and immature.”

He refines the insult: “Uh, attractive, charming, weak and immature, completely under the sway of the ideologues. Trudeau made that manifest with one of his first decisions. When he set up his cabinet in 2015, he made it 50 percent female, despite the fact that only 25 percent of the people elected were female, which first of all means that he did not pick the most qualified people for his cabinet.” He adds, “Just make them 50 percent women, because the best way, obviously,

to pick cabinet members is on the basis of their *genitalia*.”

Throughout our conversation, Peterson’s go-to tack as a professional persuader is to insist that those who disagree with him simply don’t have the facts—particularly when it comes to sexual identity. For instance, he cites studies showing that, as he puts it, “almost all the people who are really interested in *things* are men”—as opposed to women, who are, on average, more interested in people. According to various researchers, this helps explain why men gravitate toward thing-obsessed professions (engineering, architecture) and women toward helping professions (teaching, medicine).

Peterson, of course, is always ready to head off counterarguments at the pass: “You might say, ‘Well, those differences are socioculturally constructed,’ which is what the postmodern types would claim. But that’s not true, because all the data suggests that as a society

becomes more egalitarian, the differences between men and women get bigger, not smaller. And no one disputes this data. This isn’t some pseudoscience dreamt up by right-wingers.”

At another point in our conversation, Peterson makes clear his thoughts about sex and sexuality in regard to this magazine and its founder, Hugh Hefner.

“The problem with Hugh,” Peterson says, “was that he thought sex was recreational, essentially.” He pauses for effect, then adds, “It’s not”—saying “not” with both a rounded Canadian vowel and a scolding tone.

“So what he did was wrong. Now, that doesn’t mean it should have been illegal, but he was part of the process by which the sexual revolution occurred. You don’t want to pin it on him, because mostly it was driven by the birth control pill, and that’s a biological revolution.”

This is classic Peterson—the Peterson you meet on YouTube. In addition to the content he posts on his own channel, his fans have posted countless excerpts from his TV interviews and internet Q&As in which he expounds, disapprovingly, on the sexual revolution. In one clip, titled “Jordan Peterson—The Birth Control Pill,” he links the pill to the “big ’60s experiment” of sexual promiscuity and adds, “It isn’t obvious that that went particularly well. It certainly led to the pornographication of our society, which I really think is actually quite dreadful.”

At the same time, in *12 Rules* he celebrates the male inventors of the tampon, anesthesia (first used to lessen the pain of childbirth) and, yes, the birth control pill. “In what manner,” he writes, “were these practical, enlightened, persistent men part of a constricting patriarchy? Why do we teach our young people that our incredible culture is the result of male oppression?”

Below a Peterson fan video with the title card “Why Casual Sex Is Wrong,” the most up-voted comment is “Jordan Peterson fans don’t have casual sex anyway,” followed by a pile-on that includes “They don’t have any form of sex at all” and “Weak, stupid virgins.”



Peterson discusses gender pronouns and the law with University of Toronto students in October 2016.

I like pussy. Have fun cleaning your rooms that no one will ever enter.”

• • •

Peterson’s assorted declarations—particularly about gender and identity—are not only controversial in some quarters; they’ve resulted in his attracting some very controversial supporters. James Sears, head of an unregistered neo-Nazi Canadian political party, admiringly described Peterson as a “Nazi philosopher” in a July 2017 tweet accompanied by an image of two young men posing with Peterson at a speaking engagement; the men are holding a giant flag of Pepe the Frog, the cartoon amphibian that started as an innocuous internet meme but by 2016 had been vaguely appropriated by white supremacists. Grilled by an interviewer for the public Canadian Broadcasting Corporation earlier this year, Peterson said that the shot was hastily taken, that he has been photographed thousands of times with his fans at events and that “the left sees all sorts of things as hate symbols.”

When I ask Peterson about extremist ideologies, including white supremacy, he says, “I’ve been thinking about the difference between the right and the left, because obviously the right can go too far. If you’re on the right, as soon as you start making claims of ethnic or racial superiority, you can put those people in a box and you can say *no*. On the left, we know the left can go too far, but we don’t know *when*. I think it’s because it’s a multivariate problem. You can’t point to one thing, one policy, one ideological axiom on the left that has the same degree of self-evident toxicity that racial superiority does, though I think equity comes close, the demand for equality of outcome”—i.e., the anti-capitalist idea that we should all more or less end up with the same number of marbles, no matter how we play the game.

The Jordan Peterson who is famous today for positions such as these was shaped by the Jordan Peterson who wrote *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief*, which was published in 1999 by British academic press Routledge. He describes the decade and a half he spent working on that tome as a profoundly formative experience: “I was comparing and contrasting two narratives—let’s say the narrative that drove the Communists and the narrative that drove the West. I was curious in a postmodern way, I suppose, about whether or not these were just two arbitrary narratives. Because that’s a possibility, right? We’re all socially constructed. We can organize ourselves according to whatever narrative we want.

“What I figured out was that the narrative of the West is not arbitrary; it’s just right. We got it right—that the individual is sovereign. That’s

the right answer to the problem of tribalism. I don’t care if it’s tribalism on the left or the right.”

Of course, Peterson’s certainty about the superiority of the West and the historical triumphs of the patriarchy inevitably rattles those who have problems with certain Western and patriarchal traditions (e.g., structural discrimination). Last October, street fliers were anonymously posted near Peterson’s Toronto home that read, in part, “Community Safety Bulletin: Jordan Peterson, a local man teaching at the University of Toronto, has been campaigning against the human rights of women, people of colour, Muslims and LGBT people for over a year.... Due to pressure from Jordan Peterson’s alt-right base, the University of Toronto has not taken any action to fire him or disavow his attacks on minority groups.”

Those who have dared to criticize Peterson non-anonymously have felt the wrath of the professor’s defenders. In February, when Harrison Fluss, a philosophy lecturer at St. John’s University and Manhattan College, published a piece titled “Jordan Peterson’s Bullshit” (“Jordan Peterson’s thought is filled with pseudo-science, bad pop psychology, and



deep irrationalism...”) in the leftist journal *Jacobin*, Fluss-bashing, in posts with headlines such as HARRISON FLUSS’S BULLSHIT, became a cottage industry among Peterson’s online followers. And last November, when Tabatha Southey, a columnist at the Canadian news magazine *Maclean’s*, published a piece headlined IS JORDAN PETERSON THE STUPID MAN’S SMART PERSON?, a similar cottage industry erupted (e.g., IS TABATHA SOUTHEY THE TERRIBLE PERSON’S VIRTUOUS PERSON?), and Southey was stalked on social media. As she later told *The Guardian*, “His fans are relentless. They have contacted me, repeatedly, on just about every platform possible.”

And so there has been a chilling effect. In March, when the *Toronto Star*’s Vinay Menon profiled the suddenly famous local scholar, he noted, in his largely positive piece, that he couldn’t get Peterson’s previously public critics to go on the record. (PLAYBOY likewise found it challenging to get prominent Peterson critics to comment for this profile.)

• • •

At Peterson’s big show this evening, the crowd is overwhelmingly white—which is often the



case for any pricey do on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. It skews male. The average age is maybe 30 to 35. Earlier Peterson told me, “It isn’t self-evident to me that I have a demographic, even if what I’m trying to do is exhort young men to grow the hell up and accept their responsibility.”

Onstage, Peterson comes off as a kinder, gentler version of the man I spoke with earlier in the day. He’s often funny in a way he isn’t when he’s in combative, sound-bite-spewing interview mode. He’s a born teacher with the stentorian cadence of a self-appointed prophet, but he also has a chuckle that can call to mind Seth Rogen. He speaks without a book in hand and without teleprompters, engagingly stringing together parables. And after a couple of hours, he runs out of time before he can get through even half the rules.

His audience loves him—he gets a standing ovation upon entrance and exit—and it’s clear he loves being loved. The frequent applause, the laughter, the murmurs of assent all soften him.

Peterson, a lifelong academic who hates aca-

demia, who thinks universities are doomed because of their “subsidization and promotion of crazy radical-left ideologies,” is among his people here—here and online, of course.

I flash back to the morning at the hotel when I briefly spoke with Tammy, his wife of 29 years. They met in Fairview, a town in the province of Alberta with a population of 2,998 (about 100 more than the seating capacity of the Beacon). At one point she joined her husband and me at our table, and I asked her what it was like being married to a 55-year-old internet celebrity.

Without missing a beat she said, “It’s kind of lonely. I mean, if I didn’t travel with him, I’d never see him. He’s too busy now with the world.”

Peterson chimed in: “Part of the stress for Tammy—well, for me but her obviously by proxy—is that for the last two years I’ve been in a situation where if I ever said anything wrong it would have been essentially fatal. It’s a knife’s edge. Things have come close to going wrong.” He laughed nervously and added, “I’ve been in a political scandal, of one

form or another, on a two-week basis—every two weeks for two years.”

Saying exactly what you think—even if what you think can sound radically retrograde, even if it attracts the approval of undesirable tribes—is part of the manly art of being Jordan Peterson. The professor could not care less if you are offended or triggered.

While Tammy was still sitting with us, her husband said, “This whole idea that you should be harmless is just an absolute pathology. You should be as dangerous as you could possibly make yourself, and then you should bring yourself under control. And of course that’s right. Of course that’s obviously the case. Women don’t like weak men, not unless there’s something wrong with them.”

I turned to Tammy and said, “Well, you married this guy, so I guess—”

She waited a beat or two and then responded with quiet precision: “I looked at him for a long time before I married him. I made sure he would be somebody who could stand up against life. And when I decided he could, I married him.” ■



bob

Shark Fin Dinner Party

FICTION BY **LING MA**

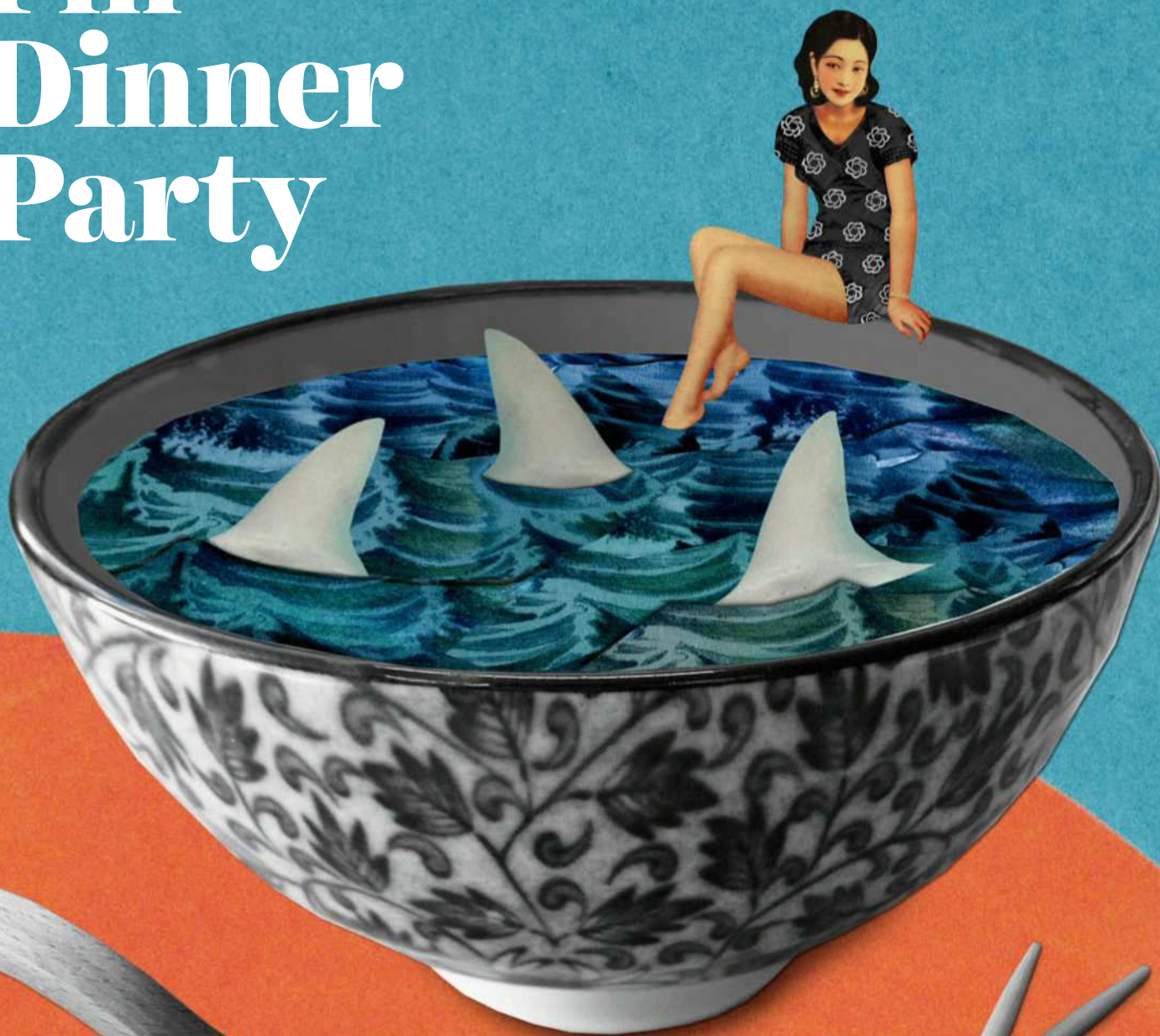


ILLUSTRATION BY **GREEDY HEN**



The shark fin dinner party took place on a cold, rainy Saturday night in late August. It marked the end of that strange transitory summer and the beginning of something else.

The guests consisted of a mix of college friends and Jane's people, co-workers and neighbors. They crowded into our railroad apartment, guys in skinny ties and suits, girls with big Aqua Net hair and acrylic nails. They piled their coats on our beds, rolled a keg up the stairs, brought little hostess gifts. Giorgio Moroder played in the background. Someone came dressed as Ronald Reagan, pelting girls with jelly beans from his suit pocket.

We'd created a makeshift Trump-themed dining table in our living room by arranging collapsible card tables end to end. Over this Jane had laid a metallic gold tablecloth, weighted by a thrifted brass candelabra, and bouquets of fake plastic flowers she'd spray-painted gold. On the table were ironic pre-dinner canapes: salmon mousse quenelles with dill cream, spinach dip in a bread bowl, Ritz crackers and a ball of pimento cheese in the shape of Trump's hair.

I navigated through the rooms in one of my mother's loose, billowy Contempo Casuals dresses, this one black with a white burnout Africana print.

In the midst of this fray was Steven Reitman, dressed as if for a Hamptons boating party, standing amongst the secondhand furniture of my bedroom. I had invited him almost as a joke, considering that we hadn't seen each other all summer, so I hadn't actually expected him to come.

Is this a dinner party or a costume party? he asked, pressing his whiskered cheek to mine in an air kiss. The scent of his expensive yuzu aftershave made me suddenly wistful for the few times we'd spent together. I swallowed.

You don't need an '80s costume, I said. You can say you're here for research, observing millennials in their natural habitat. I sat down on the edge of my bed, pushing aside the mountain of jackets.

So you invited me to be the party ethnographer? Should've brought my notebook. He sat down beside me, crossing his legs, exposing ankle sock. The bed sagged.

I shrugged and sipped from my rum and Coke. The dim light from the nightstand lamp dramatized our expressions.

How have you been? Sitting very close, he spoke in a low, conspiratorial tone, intimating an intimacy that we never really shared. I noticed that his sports jacket featured a Liberty floral pocket square that someone else, another girl, I assumed, must've helped him choose. No way would he have chosen it on his own.

How's the postcollege job market looking? he pressed.

I don't know. I've been focusing more on, I guess, personal projects.

Well, the reason I ask is—he reached into his

back pocket—I didn't come empty-handed. He opened his wallet. For a moment I was afraid he was going to hand me cash, but it was something else, a business card. It read, MICHAEL REITMAN, CEO.

It's my brother's company, Steven explained. There's a position open. Give him a call.

You told your brother about me? I studied the card uncertainly, trying to make out the letters in the low light. What's Spectrum?

Spectra, he corrected. They're a publishing consulting firm that handles book production. It's not art or design, but it's something. They're looking to fill an assistant position. My brother will have more details, if you get in touch.

I studied the card again, avoiding Steven's gaze. I didn't need a job right away, but I needed *something*, a point of entry into another life that wasn't just about milling around, walking. I could feel my parents' disapproval hanging over me. I was embarrassed that Steven had sensed what I needed.

Thank you, I finally said. But you didn't have to.

It's nothing. I just mentioned you. Now he looked embarrassed.

I know we're not—

Dinner is ready! Jane clamored through the rooms, gathering guests up.

You go ahead, I told Steven. I'll be right in.

He stood up. Okay. I'll see you in there?

I smiled reassuringly. When he left the room, I closed the door. Then, I crawled to the head of my bed, over the mountain of jackets, where I opened the window and climbed out onto the fire escape. The tinny, collapsible structure winced. The air outside was cool and humid. Tiny pinpricks of rain dotted my arms.

The fire escape looked out on the backs of other apartment buildings and a communal garden that all the ground-level tenants shared, its disorganized, uncultivated plots overrun with ghetto palms and ruffraff vegetation; a dash of wildflowers here, a fledgling fruit tree there.

I sat down. A full minute elapsed before I started crying. Or more like a shallow, panicky mouth breathing, dry and sobless. I tried to focus my breath, steady it, in and out, like breaststrokes in deep, choppy water.

Hey, you're blocking all the rain.

The voice came from below. I looked down. Through the grating, I saw a guy sitting on his window ledge, reading a book, smoking a cigarette. He was the summer subletter downstairs. I'd seen him at the mailboxes.

Sorry, I said automatically.

He looked up, smiled impishly. No sorry. Just giving you a hard time.

I'm getting some air, I explained unnecessarily.

Okay. He blew out a lungful of smoke. Fire escape is all yours. Do you mind if I just finish this first?

I considered the top of his head. Can I have one?

Sure. Then, after a pause, Should I come up?

I looked into my empty room. I could hear Jane still rallying everyone to the table. I'll just come down.

The fire escape rattled beneath my feet. He helped me down the last steps, where, at the landing, I extended my hand. He had a surprisingly firm grip, given his thin, boyish frame. There was a sadness to his face, dark circles under his blue eyes.

He asked, Do you want to wait here or come inside while I get you one?

I peeked inside his window. Is this your room?

Yes. He hesitated. Would you like to come in?

I climbed in and looked around. He lived in the room directly below mine. It was the same room—our apartments shared the same floor plan—except cleaner, better. My room was messy, cluttered with too many things. His room was clean and ascetic, bare walls dimly lit by a floor lamp. There was something serene about it, a temple emptied of all ceremonial accoutrements and cleared of incense smoke.

I live right above you, I informed him.

I know. I can hear you walking late at night. You pace. He caught himself. Sorry, I don't mean to sound creepy. You just have this skittish way of walking.

A skittish way of walking?

Like, restless. I hear your roommate too. She gets up very early. I can hear her grinding coffee.

Does she not have a skittish way of walking?

He contemplated this. Um, no. Your roommate walks very purposefully, but you, you're more unsettled, unsure. Not an insult, just an observation. He had found his pack of American Spirits and handed one to me, not touching the filter. I liked that consideration.

I rolled it around between my fingers. My roommate gets up early, I allowed. It's a long commute. She has this fashion PR job in Jersey.

Here, sit down. I can't find my light. Let me get one from the kitchen.

I sat down on the edge of the bed. It was a mattress on the floor, carefully dressed with white sheets. There was no chair. Affixed on the walls were two plastic hooks, one for a towel and the other for a jacket next to the door frame. In lieu of a dresser, clothes were neatly stacked in three rows on the floor against the wall: jeans, underwear and white T-shirts. A small floor lamp was arranged next to a few library books. Rousseau. Foucault.

When he returned, he was holding the largest butane lighter I'd ever seen. May I? he asked.

I nodded, and he attempted to light my cigarette, ridiculously, the gas flame licking my cheek.

Should we go back outside? I don't want to smoke up your room.



No, stay. Smoke up my room. He sat down on the bed. We smoked. He seemed content to say nothing.

So, I said, searching. Tell me about what you do. I regretted it as soon as I asked. It was the question everyone asked everyone else in New York, so careerist, so boring.

What I do for money or what I actually do?

Both, I guess. I exhaled a plume of smoke.

I temp for money, usually copywriting jobs. I freelance a bit too, a few articles and interviews. But what I actually do is write fiction. And you, what about you?

I live off my parents, I said, surprised by the casualness with which I dispensed this information. I didn't elaborate that they were both deceased, and that the family coffers or whatever would last me just long enough—maybe, say, for the next 10, 15 years—for me to be comfortable with not working, long enough to be useless. The fruits of my immigrant father's lifelong efforts would be gobbled up and squandered by me, his lazy, disaffected daughter.

But I'm looking for a job, I added. I have an interview coming up at this place called Spectra. What are you interviewing for?

Um, I have no idea.

He smiled, as if to himself. By this point, my

in the mirror. My private grievances were all over my face. I looked upset. My skin looked dry and tight; I'd probably forgotten to moisturize. I threw some water on my face.

When I opened the door, he was waiting in the hallway. Together, we entered my apartment the same way I had left it: up the fire escape, through my window and into my room. We walked into the living room, to a dinner that had just begun. Everyone looked up.

Who's this? Jane asked.

This is, um— I turned to him, realizing we'd never introduced ourselves.

Jonathan, he said.

Jonathan, I repeated. He's our downstairs neighbor.

Can I get you something to drink, Jonathan? Jane said. If she was annoyed by our lateness, she didn't show it. We have kamikazes, rum and Cokes, anything.

Just seltzer water if you have any.

I'll get it, I said, walking to the kitchen while Jane pulled up an extra chair for him, clear across the other end of the table, while I was seated next to Steven.

Once we were all seated, we beheld the magnum opus at the center of the table: The shark fin soup was arranged in a crystal punch bowl with a ladle, prom-style. Actually, two punch bowls.

man than he because he was a fair man. Or something like that.

And you're not a fair man? I asked Steven.

A *family* man, Steven corrected, slurring. My brother has always been a family man. Whereas I have only performed at it. And badly.

I realized he was addressing his divorce, the emotional repercussions he must have been struggling with. He'd never spoken of his family, and whatever information I'd gleaned was vague and clichéd: the distant wife, the troubled children.

You're fine, I said. You're okay. Nothing bad is happening right now.

He smiled, eyes bloodshot, and spooned his soup.

Suddenly, I felt a bit nauseated. It was so hot and smoky and perfumed inside.

In keeping with the vaguely Orientalist theme, Jane had bought a mah-jongg set that we were all supposed to play after dinner, but no one could figure out the game.

Candace, I thought you knew how to play this, someone yelled at me.

Why, because I'm Asian?

We gave up. We disassembled the card tables that made up our dining table and moved them out into the hallway. The living room was cleared.

The alarm broke a spell;

cigarette had gone out. I hesitated. There's a party that I'm supposed to be hosting.

What, now? He started.

I nodded. They've probably begun without me. You're invited, if you'd like.

I'll walk you up at least. He stood up and came over to me. I thought he was going to pull me up, but instead, he licked his thumb and touched my cheeks. I realized that he was clearing off dried streaks of mascara. I'd forgotten that only moments earlier, I'd been crying.

I'm going to pretend you're not cleaning me with your spit. I closed my eyes. Is it coming off?

No. You might have to use my bathroom.

Can I use your bathroom?

Sure. It's down the—actually, you know where it is.

I walked to where my bathroom would have been. The bathroom was also tidy, unlike our space, full of generic Duane Reade products lined up in his medicine cabinet, which I opened to look for prescription pill bottles. There weren't any. I couldn't see his private grievances.

I closed the cabinet and looked at myself

One for the original soup, and another for the mysterious vegan version that Jane had made.

Jane served all of us, ladling it out into bowls.

The shark fin had a strange, gelatinous texture. We chewed for a long time, then swished the soup down with red wine.

I should've bought white, Jane said. Better with seafood.

The tannins, someone agreed.

It's not bad, Jonathan said, and really seemed to mean it.

The rest of us forced the soup down our throats. Jane passed around a glass candy dish full of oyster crackers, which guests sprinkled in their bowls. It didn't make the soup any more palatable, any less sour or musty. I wondered if I'd made it wrong. The recipe had called for fresh shark fins. Instead, I had soaked the dried fins in filtered water for a few hours, to reconstitute them, before I'd made the soup. Aside from that, I had followed the recipe precisely.

I guzzled more wine than I could handle. Steven turned to me, his low voice forcing me to lean a little closer. He was saying something about his brother, how his brother was a better

Suddenly, the sound of the fire alarm cut through the room. Everyone winced, covered their ears against the shrill electronic shriek.

What's burning? someone asked. I don't smell anything.

It's all the cigarette smoke, another person yelled.

Shit. Well, crack a window.

Should we stop smoking? a girl asked, her hand frozen, clutching her cigarette.

Jane waved her hand. Guys! Just dismantle the alarm! She climbed a kitchen chair to the smoke alarm on the ceiling, located the battery hatch and removed it.

The alarm had broken a spell. Afterward, everyone began to relax. We hooked up an iPod to the speakers and took turns deejaying. People jumped around in unison, a faux mosh pit. With happy, sunny pop music. In the kitchen, others played a drinking game called Bullshit Pyramid. Someone else had brought Twister, and the mat was laid out in the middle of my room. I wandered from room to room, circulating, playing at everything and losing, laughing hysterically as I scattered the cards, stumbled on



the mat, jumped up and down, out of sync.

When other people are happy, I don't have to worry about them. There is room for my happiness. In this happiness, I lost track of Jane. I lost track of Steven. I lost track of Jonathan. I had seen him talking to a bunch of people as they sat around on the floor. Later still, through a curtain of smoke, I saw him in my room, looking through my bookcase. Those books aren't mine! I wanted to yell, even though that was not true. They were all mine. *My Antonia*. *Windowlight*. *Namedropper*. *Crime and Punishment*, the one thing I saved from freshman English. *The Metamorphosis*. The *Sweet Valley High* series, paperbacks of teen horror and sci-fi that I had pilfered from visits back home. Christopher Pike. R.L. Stine. Coming-of-agers. *I Capture the Castle*. *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*. A collection of defunct magazines from the '90s, *Index* being my favorite. How long had he been in there? And even later, I glimpsed him in Jane's room, watching some Italian movie on a laptop with a group of people, the loud exclamatory Italian phrases like typewriter keys clacking. *Come stai?* What was there to do but smile. I smiled and waved. Come join us, he yelled after me as I went down the hallway to do something else, I forget what. After that, I

was utterly, swervingly drunk, and with that drunkenness came complete, terrorizing amorousness. But no, he was not just drunk. Something else. He had ingested something, it was so clear that he had ingested something. Maybe he had taken it willingly, or maybe someone had slipped it to him as a joke. My friends could be assholes.

Steven was touching my face, his eyes glassy. You look so sad, he said.

I'm not sad, I replied. Are you having a good time?

You're so beautiful, he said, not answering me. You're really beautiful, he repeated.

Thank you, I said maturely. Would you like me to call you a cab?

He shook his head vigorously. No. I want to stay.

Okay, you can stay. But why don't you lie down. I led him to the living room, toward the sofa. I was removing his shoes, attempting to unknot his gray leather shoelaces, so fine, like mouse whiskers.

No. I want to say something. I want to tell you something, he said urgently.

What's that?

He took my face in his hands and looked at me. I am alone, Steven said. I am without family, I am alone.

a few feet away, didn't stir. With the both of us lying low, he started kissing me. It was like tumbling down a dizzying Escher staircase of beer-tasting embraces and caresses. I kissed him back. Through the yuzu aftershave, I could remember what it was like to kiss him, at the beginning of the summer, when he first took me over to his loft. I went around, looking at his things, his books, the framed art on the walls, his furniture that he'd paid someone to arrange. I opened up his bathroom cabinet and sniffed his collection of aftershaves. I opened up his closet and looked at his wood hangers and shoe trees. He got off on my curiosity. When I kissed him, it was like I was kissing all his things, all the signifiers and trappings of adulthood or success coming at me in a rush. Fucking was just seeing that to its end, a white yacht docking.

Now Steven was the one to disentangle himself. Hold on. Let's go to your room.

We walked to my room, to the very end of the railroad, where I saw Jonathan. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, fully dressed, reading. My heart dropped. As we came into the room, he looked up at Steven and me, putting two and two together. What was there for me to do but smile and try not to look too disgusting.

I was just leaving. Jonathan stood up and

everyone began to relax.

didn't see him and I figured he had probably gone back downstairs, through the fire escape of my room.

I don't know how many hours passed. I stopped and started. When I was tired, I sprawled out on the rug. When I was hungry, I nibbled on chips in the kitchen. I drank Sprite and wine coolers I found in the fridge. I was like a homeless person in my own house.

I was enjoying myself, but it was an insulated enjoyment. I was alone inside of it.

Around four, the party began to wind down. The sky had begun to lighten outside the window. Guests were gradually leaving, one by one or in groups, peeling themselves off the rug of our living room, where we hovered, drinking and passing a spliff. Jane was sleeping on the floor. The mountain of coats and jackets on my bed diminished until only a few remained. I identified Steven's sports coat, which he had taken off sometime during the night. It was missing its pocket square.

I picked it up and walked through the apartment. Steven? I called.

I found him in the bathroom, gripping the sink. He had sweat through his shirt. He

You're not alone, I said, though I did not know this to be a fact. And, because I was not close enough to him to tell him the truth, I added, You have people all around you. You're on TV.

I missed you, he persisted.

You have people, I repeated, not knowing what else to say.

No, you're not hearing me. You're not hearing me even though you understand. I missed you. All summer, I kept thinking about you.

Is that why you came? I asked, thinking of the times he had deflected my IMs, the times I had deflected his.

He looked at me. You invited me. Why did you invite me?

I didn't answer this. Instead, I said, A lot has changed for me this summer.

Like what? He was grabbing my wrists. How are you different? You look the same. Exactly the same.

He lurched toward me. I pulled back. Undeterred, he lunged again and attempted to kiss me, madly, desperately. When I pulled back again, he came crashing to the floor, dragging me down with him. Jane, lying on the rug

went to the window. I followed him, to close the window after him. When he pulled himself out on the fire escape, he turned around, his face half concealed by shadows.

Come downstairs and see me sometime, he said.

I will. Good night, I said, and as I turned away to go, his hand grabbed my arm.

Candace.

I smiled. Jonathan. What?

He leaned over and whispered in my ear. You're making a mistake. Then, before I could react, he licked my ear. With the tip of his tidy, scratchy tongue, he grazed the bottom of the lobe to the tip of the ear, in one stealth swoop.

I stepped back, grabbing my ear with both hands as if someone had cut it off. It was warm, and wet.

With that, he closed my window and descended the fire escape. I heard the fragile, thin metal clanging as he climbed down. I heard his window opening. Then I heard it close.

From the novel Severance by Ling Ma, out August 14 from Farrar, Straus and Giroux.



Mane

Stay

*Spend a languid afternoon in Pasadena with blonde beauty **Megan Moore***

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KYLE DELEU**













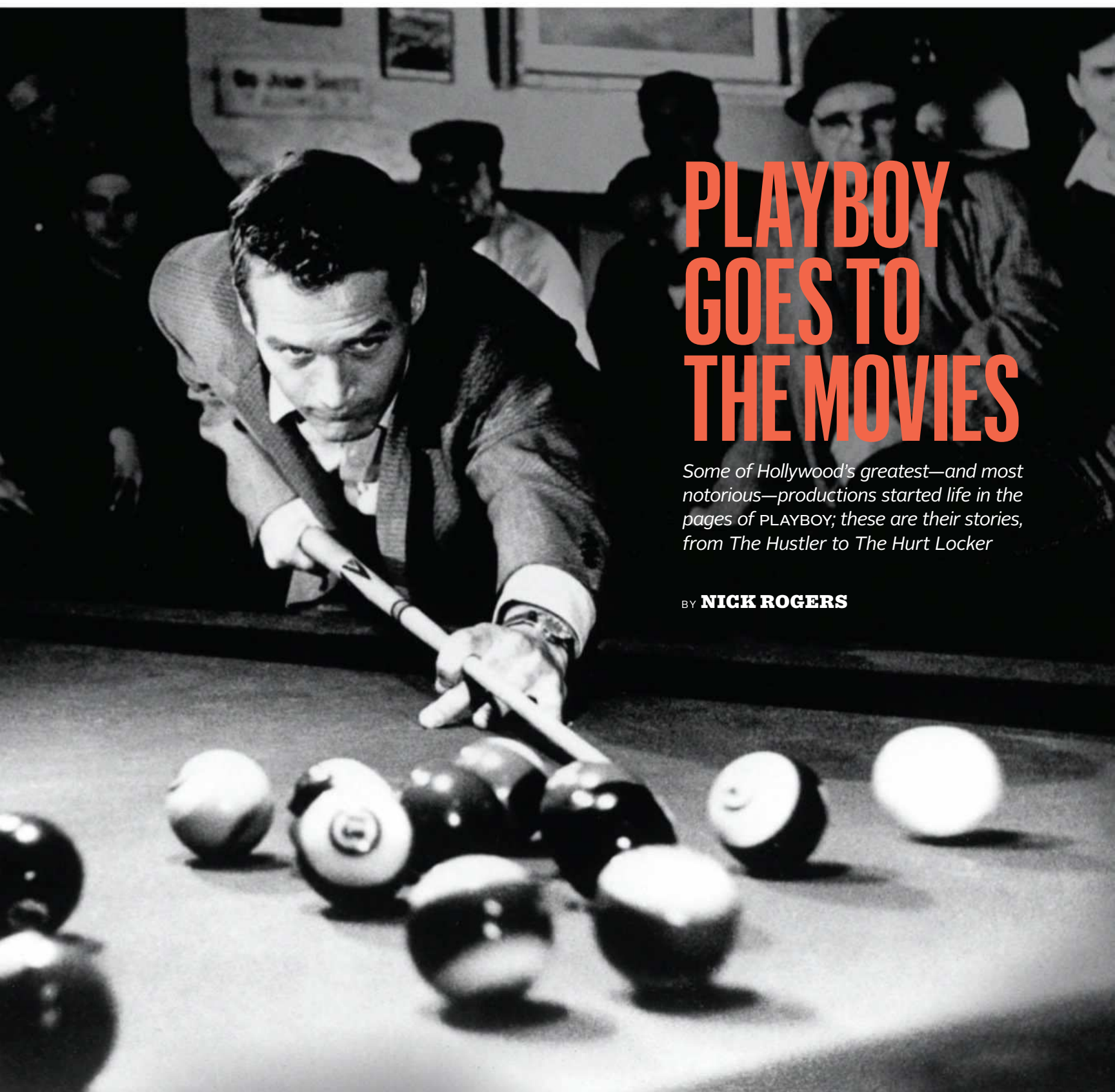






HEF'S FIRST ROAST • CLASSIC PLAYMATES • VINTAGE CARTOONS • BEHIND THE SCENES OF A BELOVED COVER

HERITAGE



PLAYBOY GOES TO THE MOVIES

*Some of Hollywood's greatest—and most notorious—productions started life in the pages of PLAYBOY; these are their stories, from *The Hustler* to *The Hurt Locker**

BY **NICK ROGERS**

Hollywood may be awash in adaptations, sequels, prequels and reboots, but we can't complain about the many times it has turned to PLAYBOY for source material. The films that have sprung from works of short fiction or non-fiction originally published in these pages span five decades and genres as diverse as science fiction, sports, horror and...however you'd classify a Charlie Sheen biker flick.

Here's a look at our favorite cinematic classics and curios that began life as original PLAYBOY stories.

Sinking the Eight Ball

The Hustler, Walter S. Tevis's short story about a pool shark stalking dangerous prey, exceeds the "nice jolts" promised by our January 1957 issue's *Playbill*. Richard Tyler's accompanying illustration reflects the boldness with which protagonist Sam Willis tries to redraw his life, while Tevis's tale belies the foolhardy—and in this case fatal—belief that

a fresh start can altogether change a person or erase their vulnerabilities.

The 1961 film of the same name rechristens Sam as Fast Eddie Felson and lets him live, albeit with damning consequences. Paul Newman tapped reservoirs of resignation and regret to create the indelible character, but years later he faulted his own performance, telling PLAYBOY in 1983 that he felt he had been "working too hard, showing too much"—the lament of an idol without an Oscar. Four years later, he got one—for reviving Fast Eddie in 1986's *The Color of Money*, another film based on a Tevis story. As Fast Eddie says, "The balls roll funny for everybody, kiddo."

What's the Buzz?

Paris-born British author George Langelaan's classic *The Fly* (June 1957) introduces readers to a scientist who accidentally fuses his genes with a housefly and mutates into a man-insect hybrid. The narrator's anxieties

about technology, government secrecy and self-transformation may well have reflected Langelaan's own: As a spy in World War II, he underwent facial reconstruction to make his features less conspicuous.

Prioritizing lore over gore, the 1958 film based on the PLAYBOY story is most famous for its human-fly screaming "Help me!" as a hungry spider advances. The movie shies away from Langelaan's harsher themes, justifying even the most horrifying outcomes of scientific exploration as manifest destiny. Langelaan's vividly gruesome but unexpectedly tender approach is more accurately captured in David Cronenberg's dark, operatic version of *The Fly* (1986), starring Jeff Goldblum. Unrelentingly disgusting and unforgettably somber, its climax tragically evokes the Langelaan line "No matter how awful the result of your experiment or accident, you are alive, you are a man, a brain...and you have a soul."

All Smiles

Ray Russell, PLAYBOY's first fiction editor, commissioned strong yarns for the magazine while spinning some himself, including *Sardonicus*, a horror story that Stephen King dubbed "perhaps the finest example of the modern Gothic ever written."

A morbidly witty story about a doctor lured by a lost lover to cure her titular husband's ghoulish perma-grin, *Sardonicus* (January 1961) was the perfect cinematic fit for producer-director William Castle, who came to consider *Mr. Sardonicus* (for which Russell wrote the screenplay) among his finest productions. The B-movie king of gimmicks such as skeletons dangling from theater rafters and seats rigged to rumble, Castle countered Columbia Pictures' demand for a happier ending with a "Punishment Poll": Just as the movie reaches its climax, Castle himself appears onscreen, ostensibly to give the audience the opportunity to decide *Sardonicus*'s fate. Thumbs up? Life. Thumbs down? Death. Castle tabulates the "votes" and declares, smiling, "No mercy? So be it." Most film historians agree Castle never shot a merciful outcome, certain that crowds would choose condemnation—a notion, like the story, worthy of chuckles and chills.

You'll Shoot Your Eye Out

There are no triple-dog dares in Jean Shepherd's *Red Ryder Nails the Hammond Kid*, Ralphie's teacher is named Miss Bodkin and Ralphie sucks on soap not for swearing but for breaking a window. For fans of holiday-movie mainstay *A Christmas Story*, this feels all wrong. But Shepherd knew that the details in his sweet-silly sketches of a Midwestern



Previous page: Paul Newman is unforgettable in *The Hustler*, the 1961 film based on Walter S. Tevis's 1957 PLAYBOY story of the same name (above). **Far right:** James Marsden and Cameron Diaz star in 2009's *The Box*, an adaptation of Richard Matheson's 1970 story *Button*, *Button* (near right).





Above left: Dennis Weaver in Steven Spielberg's tense *Duel*, based on Matheson's *PLAYBOY* tale (left). **Above right:** The original fiction on which both versions of *The Fly* are based. **Right:** Oscar-winning *The Hurt Locker* took inspiration from Mark Boal's 2005 article *The Man in the Bomb Suit*.



THE FLY *fiction* By George Langelaan
if she looked upon the horror any longer
she would scream for the rest of her life

[illegible]

middle-class childhood were transposable; that's why so many readers loved them. So it's only natural that 1983's *A Christmas Story*, co-written by Shepherd and partially adapted from his December 1965 PLAYBOY piece, switched up specifics. Both *Red Ryder* and the movie feature a struggle with a department store Santa. Absent from *A Christmas Story*, though, is Shepherd's lament for Depression-era deprivation, in which a store is "floor after floor of shiny, beautiful, unattainable treasures."

For fans of the film, reading the story today creates something of a feedback loop of nostalgia, Shepherd's imagination somehow inextricable from our own. His prose effortlessly cues up visions of the film's scenes. It also makes clear just how adeptly co-writer and director Bob Clark—once panned for the sex comedy *Porky's*—adapted far less lusty anecdotes of innocence lost.

Dread in the Driver's Seat

Suspense and horror master Richard Matheson often cackled at what passed for civilization and how easily the cracks within it widened

into chasms. Of the nine short stories he penned for PLAYBOY, two were made into films.

In June 1970's *Button, Button*, a couple is offered \$50,000 simply for pushing a button. The catch: If they push it, a stranger will die. With single-sentence paragraphs that slyly foreshadow an abyss-gazing conclusion, Matheson upends the comforts we take for granted. Unfortunately, director Richard Kelly's 2009 adaptation, *The Box*, fussily overcomplicates the premise (adding NASA, aliens and wormholes) for an effect that feels more derivative than dastardly.

Meanwhile, it's safe to say that without **PLAYBOY** there would be no Steven Spielberg as we know him. Reading Matheson's April 1971 short story, *Duel*, was "one of the few times I ever picked up **PLAYBOY** without looking at the pictures," Spielberg told fellow filmmaker Edgar Wright in an interview this year. For his directorial debut of the same name, Spielberg cut by half Matheson's own, already sparse adaptation of the story—about a nebbish everyman pursued by a homicidal truck driver—and made a 74-minute, high-speed spectacle on which he staked his claim to *Jaws* and a peerless

legacy. Not lost in Spielberg's quest for economy: Matheson's warning that the line between entropy and the everyday is easily crossed.

Good Cop, Bad Cop

"Singing Burt Reynolds" and "biker Charlie Sheen" sound like odd descriptors for films about cops confronting their codes of conduct, but then these two adaptations stray furthest from their original PLAYBOY sources.

Larry L. King's *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* took an indirect route to the silver screen. After his short story appeared in the April 1974 *PLAYBOY*, King helped reimagine it as a musical that became a Broadway hit and led to Universal Pictures buying the film rights. The 1982 movie features saccharine show tunes and none of the original story's Watergate-era ire for the "professional meddlers and candy-assed politicians" who shuttered a brothel—and King loathed it. He felt Reynolds was ill-suited to the role of Sheriff Ed Earl Dodd and, just weeks before the premiere, took to *PLAYBOY*'s pages to chide "Uncle Burt" for turning the film into "Smokey and the Bandit Go to a Whorehouse."

Even more superficial is 1994's *Beyond the*



HERITAGE

Law, based on *Undercover Angel*, Lawrence Linderman's July 1981 profile of a policeman who infiltrated the Hells Angels motorcycle club. The real Dan Black lost his family, gained a speed addiction and served time for armed robbery, as recounted by Linderman. Charlie Sheen's surrogate, Dan Saxon, suffers nightmares, boasts hair extensions and fails to prevent a murder. Black served as a consultant to the film; odds are his rehabilitation wasn't as simple as removing his shirt and retreating into the desert, as Sheen does in the film's final scene.

Our Man in Iraq

Mark Boal is arguably the poet laureate of the Iraq war's emotional toll, with incisive journalistic examinations of how machismo can turn malignant.

In his May 2004 *PLAYBOY* article, *Death and Dishonor*, Boal reports on the aftermath of the brutal murder of Army Specialist Richard Davis. The reluctance of military officials to probe Davis's disappearance prompted his retired staff-sergeant father to investigate; ultimately, the father's lifelong dedication to the service was sledgehammered to its studs. Boal has a story credit (alongside writer-director Paul Haggis) on the 2007 adaptation, *In the Valley of Elah*, which focuses less on *Dishonor*'s frustration with manipulated truth and more on the minutiae of military service give-and-take. Nevertheless, the film, and Tommy Lee Jones's Oscar-nominated turn in it, captures the blindsiding speed with which dishonesty can dismantle one's dignity.

Boal took solo reins to write 2009's *The Hurt Locker*, a fictional account inspired by his September 2005 article, *The Man in the Bomb Suit*, and a nearly month-long embed in Iraq with the U.S. Army's 788th Ordnance Company—bomb-defusing technicians who are five times more likely to die than other soldiers. Boal's article conveys the adrenalized addiction to that "morbid thrill." His Academy Award-winning script for the surprise best-picture Oscar winner mainlines it—along with nerve-shearing tension and the idea that delivering containment from chaos is a job well done.

Roll Credits

Besides their *PLAYBOY* provenance, these films have something else in common: They all wade into the murk of American morals and values—examining how they're established, exploited and eradicated—and how they can evolve. As the villain of *The Box* dispassionately decrees, "There are always consequences." ■

Our Favorite Cameos

PLAYBOY has been turning up on the silver screen for decades in roles both big and small. Often played for laughs—and to heighten sex appeal, reinforce heterosexuality and convey masculinity—the magazine, it could be argued, has fallen victim to that old Hollywood pitfall: typecasting. But whether as the star of the show or a simple walk-on, it's always fun to see an old friend appear on the big screen. Grab the popcorn.—*Cat Auer*



ADVENTURES IN BABYSITTING

PLAYBOY plays a pivotal role in this film about a sitter who looks like the latest Playmate and is desperate to get her charges safely out of Chicago and back to the burbs.



DR. STRANGELOVE

B-52 pilot Major Kong (Slim Pickens) kicks back with a June 1962 *PLAYBOY* before all nuclear hell breaks loose over precious bodily fluids. The cover's real, but the Centerfold isn't.



HOME ALONE

Before little Kevin (Macaulay Culkin) goes toe-to-toe with the Wet Bandits in his parents' empty house, he finds a July 1989 *PLAYBOY* in his big brother's "private stuff."



BACK TO THE FUTURE

In this deleted scene, Doc Brown (Christopher Lloyd) of 1955 finds a *PLAYBOY* in a suitcase from 1985. "Suddenly the future's looking a whole lot better," he says.



BAD NEWS BEARS IN BREAKING TRAINING

There's no better way for a new kid to make friends on his baseball team than to hand out copies of *PLAYBOY*—in this case, the February 1977 issue. Definite home run.



EVERYTHING MUST GO

An alcoholic decides to unload all his remaining possessions at a yard sale. Well, not quite all. "Think I want to hold on to those," he tells a curious kid about his *PLAYBOYS*.



FORREST GUMP

While in the Army, Forrest (Tom Hanks) thumbs through a (fake) July 1966 *PLAYBOY* and stumbles upon hometown darling Jenny in a modest *Girls of the South* pictorial.



ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE

Suave James Bond (George Lazenby) takes a break from safecracking to peruse the February 1969 issue and appreciate Playmate Lorrie Menconi's Centerfold.

Ribbed and Roasted

With a sense of humor to match his hedonistic habits, Hugh Hefner gamely submitted to skewering

Almost everyone remembers the 2001 Comedy Central Roast of Hugh Hefner, which took place just two and a half weeks after 9/11, when the New York City skyline was still black and smoldering. Gilbert Gottfried made a risky, too-soon joke about air travel but then won back the audience with his filthy version of “The Aristocrats,” giving grief-stricken America permission to laugh again. Hefner, in his 70s and with multiple young girlfriends, gamely tolerated a night full of gloves-off jabs about his aging body and unorthodox sex life.

But it wasn’t Hef’s first time on a dais getting roasted by his celebrity friends.

Decades before the raunchy late-night special entertained Comedy Central audiences, *The Dean Martin Celebrity Roast* was airing on NBC, and in 1973 Hefner was in the hot seat.

The program was based on the early 20th century tradition of Friars Club roasts—private dinner shows for the entertainment elite, intended to affectionately insult a guest of honor with material that often ran blue. Martin’s cleaned-up version, shot in Las Vegas, was a good-natured, black-tie affair with mostly scripted, PG-13 shtick and a martini-infused, Rat Pack vibe.

How did a magazine publisher end up as “man of the week” on a televised comedy roast? Hefner had befriended Martin along with Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. back in the 1960s. Together they were part of the hip Hollywood in-crowd, evoking an urbane style of masculinity that aligned closely with PLAYBOY’s own brand of sophisticated bachelorhood.

In fact, Hefner knew his way around a soundstage; he had charmed television audiences before, with *Playboy’s Penthouse* in 1959 and *Playboy After Dark* in 1969, programs that offered viewers a glimpse into star-studded soirees full of beautiful women. By 1973 Hefner

BY **SASCHA COHEN**

was skilled at crafting his public persona as a debonair Casanova and bon vivant.

Participating in a comedy roast was an extension of this self-mythologizing, and as a genre, the roast had much in common with Hef’s vision of PLAYBOY: creativity, rebellion against political correctness and hedonism raised to epic levels.

The jokes from the Dean Martin roast were largely flattering, referring to Hefner’s swinging lifestyle full of “booze and broads.” A sense of admiration, rather than hostility, was the theme of the evening. Although Hef was pushing 50, sportscaster Howard Cosell commented on his “taut, agile body,” and nightclub comic Jackie Gayle marveled at his

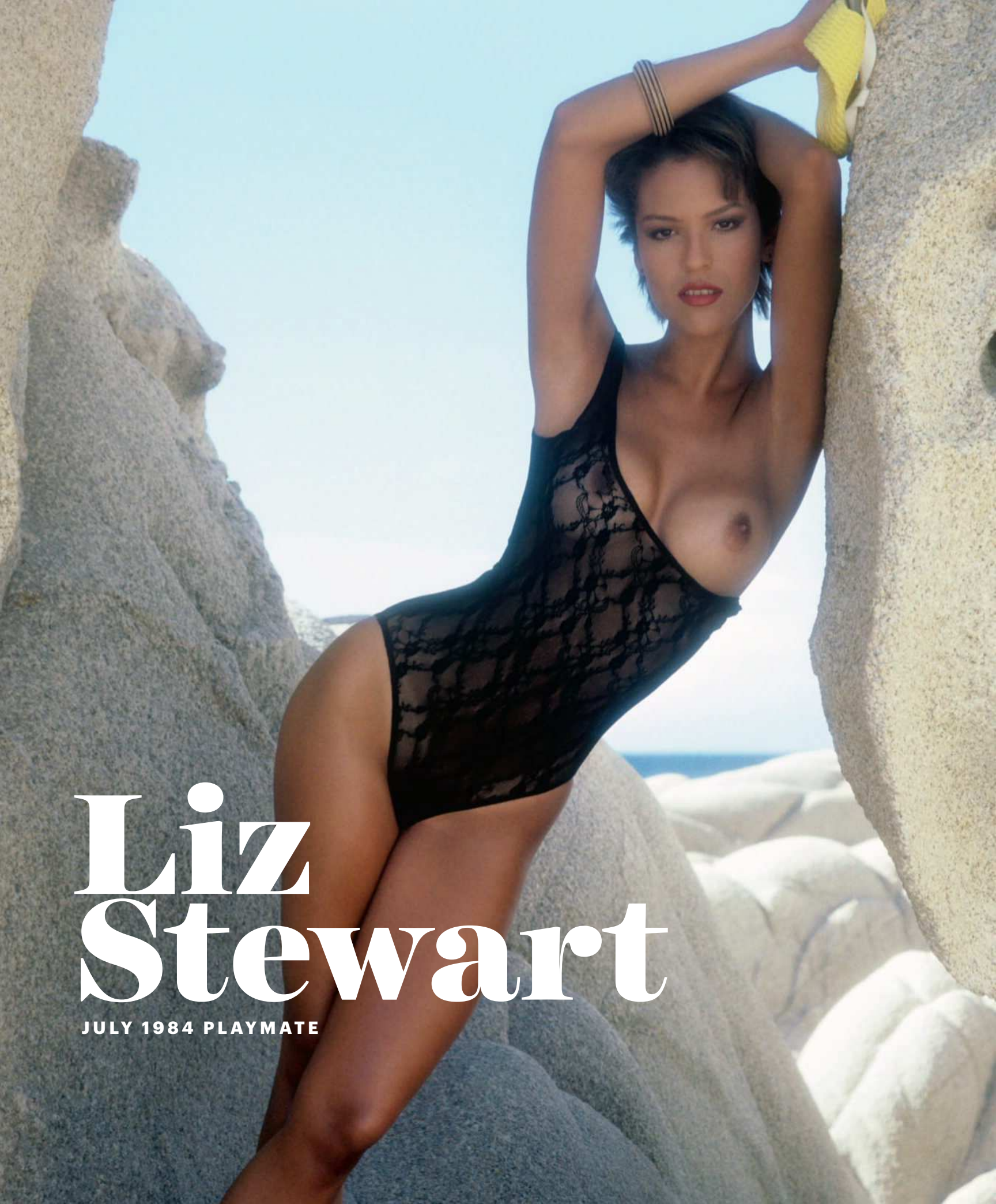
attainment of “fame, fortune and girls galore.”

Indeed, the worst thing the participants could come up with about Hefner was that he was a sex-obsessed hedonist. Martin introduced him as an “American success story” who’d picked himself up out of the gutter but “unfortunately left his mind there.” Actress Audrey Meadows joked that “Hugh shows women as they really exist, in the mind of every red-blooded American pervert.” Entertainer Joey Bishop reminded the audience that “we’re all here paying tribute to a smut peddler.”

Hefner, sporting a shag haircut and side-swept bangs, puffed his trademark pipe and smiled. When it was his turn at the podium, he quipped, “I never really realized it was possible to have this much fun sitting up.” ■



“This guy really leads a swinging life,” cracked Dean Martin about Hef during the 1973 roast. “I was up in his mansion once and I saw his bedroom. He gets so much action, he’s got the only waterbed with whitecaps.”



Liz Stewart

JULY 1984 PLAYMATE



Few have been as warmly embraced by Playboy as San Francisco-born, Los Angeles-raised Liz Stewart. Her journey with the Rabbit began when she was just 20 years old and took a job as a Bunny at the Century City Playboy Club in L.A. One day, she decided to attend an open casting call for potential Playmates. “I didn’t tell them I worked for the company,” Liz says. “They shot six Polaroids in under four minutes. When they called me back, I was floored.” Soon enough the L.A. Bunny became the July 1984 Playmate, sporting her Bunny collar and cuffs in her Centerfold pictorial. Liz eventually left the club (motherhood and a career in construction and real estate had taken precedence) but returned to the fold in 2004 as a production designer. Longtime readers will have seen her work: She designed sets, including backgrounds for shoots featuring Carmen Electra and Pamela

Anderson, and did art direction for Playmate pictorials. Creating replicas of everything from a Greek hillside to the New York Stock Exchange to Hugh Hefner’s bedroom, Liz often had mere hours to get it all done. “I learned how to make something out of nothing through those years,” she says.

Liz continues to grow with the company, these days as a video producer creating content for Playboy.com—most notably the Playmate series. Her experience as a Centerfold gives her special insight now that she’s on the other side of the camera. “I envision each Playmate’s video as her personal sizzle reel,” she says. “I want to highlight for the world her beauty and thoughts in the best way I can.”

“I’m doing what I ultimately always wanted to do,” she adds. “I’m still amazed at my path. I’m a lucky girl.” We think we’re the lucky ones.







A color photograph of a woman with long, wavy brown hair and bangs, smiling and looking over her shoulder. She is standing in a swimming pool, holding a large inflatable penguin. She is wearing a teal-colored swimsuit. The background shows a pool deck and some foliage.

Gale Olson

AUGUST 1968 PLAYMATE



By the time she was 20, Gale Olson had called more places home than most of us do in a lifetime. Born in Oklahoma, the former Army brat lived in five other states, as well as Germany and New Zealand, before her family settled in California. Having already seen much of the world, Gale dreamed of one day exploring outer space as a NASA astronaut. Her political opinions, however, reflected Earth-bound concerns. “More people ought to join political groups,” she said. “Democracies work well only when the majority of citizens get involved in the political process.” Despite describing herself as a conservative, Gale had no qualms about modeling for *PLAYBOY*. “I think every girl who has the figure for it wishes she could be a Playmate,” she said in her August 1968 interview. Forty-one years later, her daughter, Crystal McCahill, demonstrated her mom’s theory by auditioning at a *PLAYBOY* talent search and becoming the May 2009 Playmate—and our second-ever second-generation Centerfold. (Crystal even emulated Gale’s classic gatefold pool pose, at left, in her pictorial.) Now that’s a tradition we can get behind.





Classic cartoons

Summertime and the living is easy. Take a dip into our archive's comic offerings



"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Fuckin' A——"



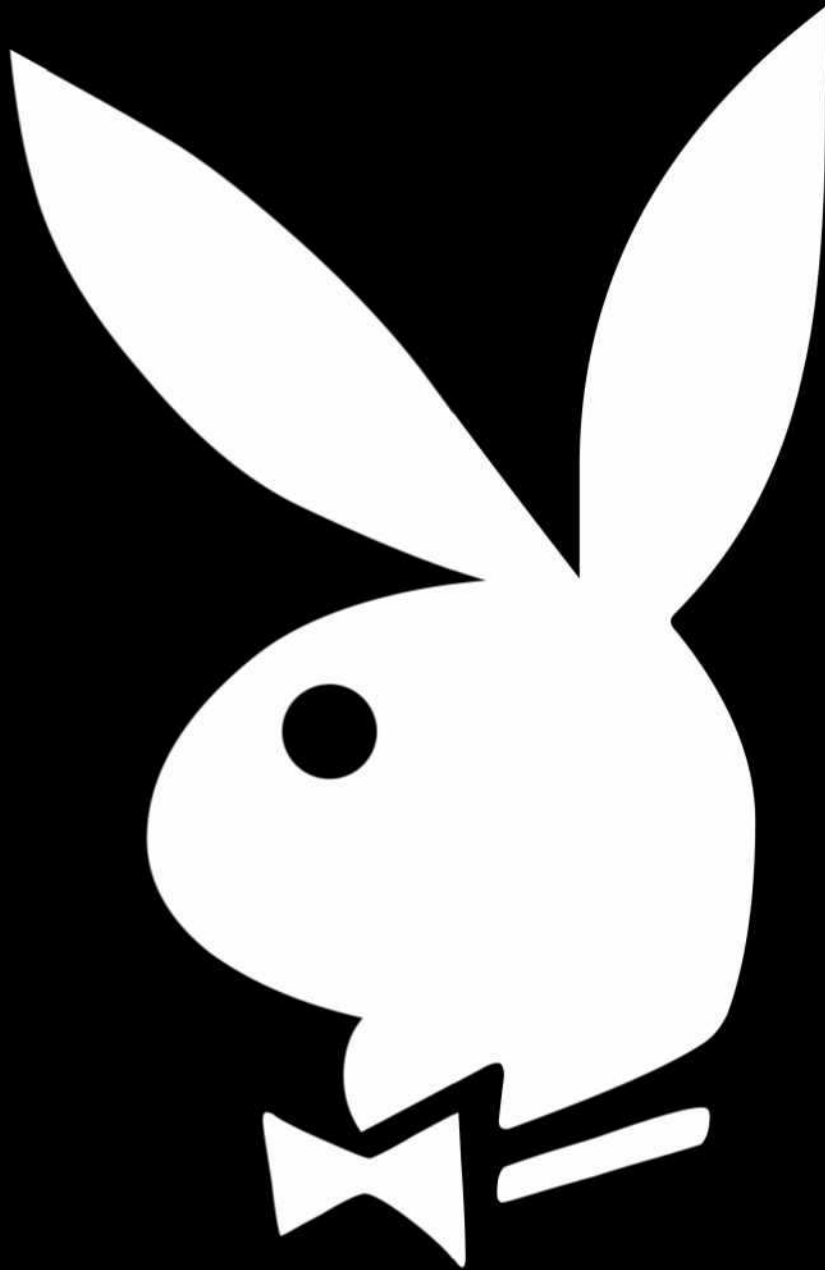
"There's a guy out here claiming we discriminate against men on the Party Jokes page."



"Protection? But, Mom—I'm wearing sunblock, sunglasses and a big hat! What more do you want?"



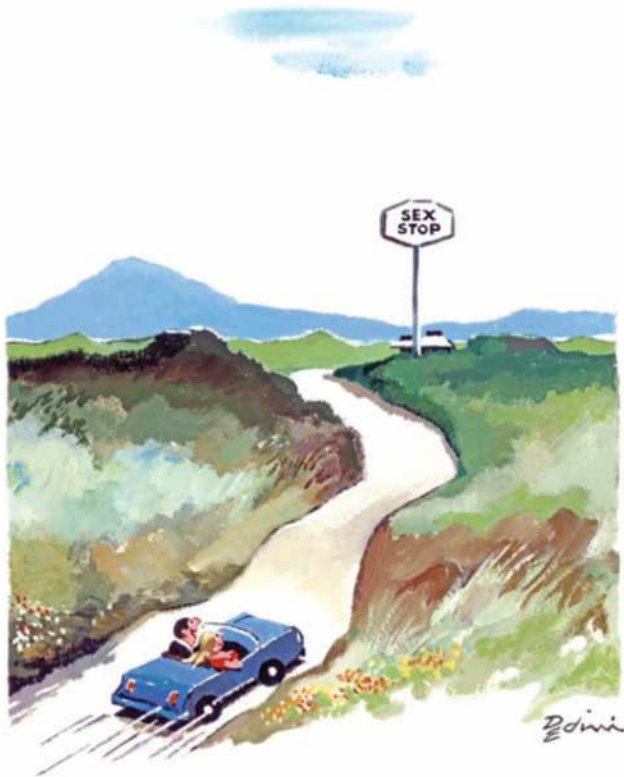
"Dear Diary: Another day in paradise. Took a walk on the beach, basked in the sunlit canopy of a tropical rain forest, crapped on a couple from Forest Hills."



*Thoughtfully
Rebellious*

PLAYBOY.COM





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*"You know what I miss most? Lighting up after sex
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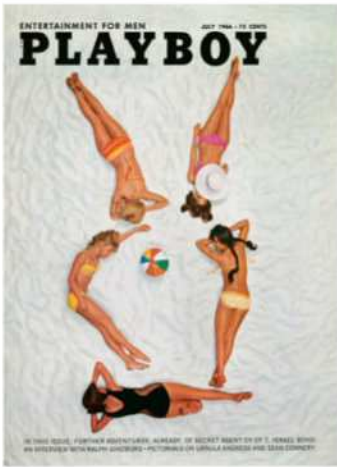
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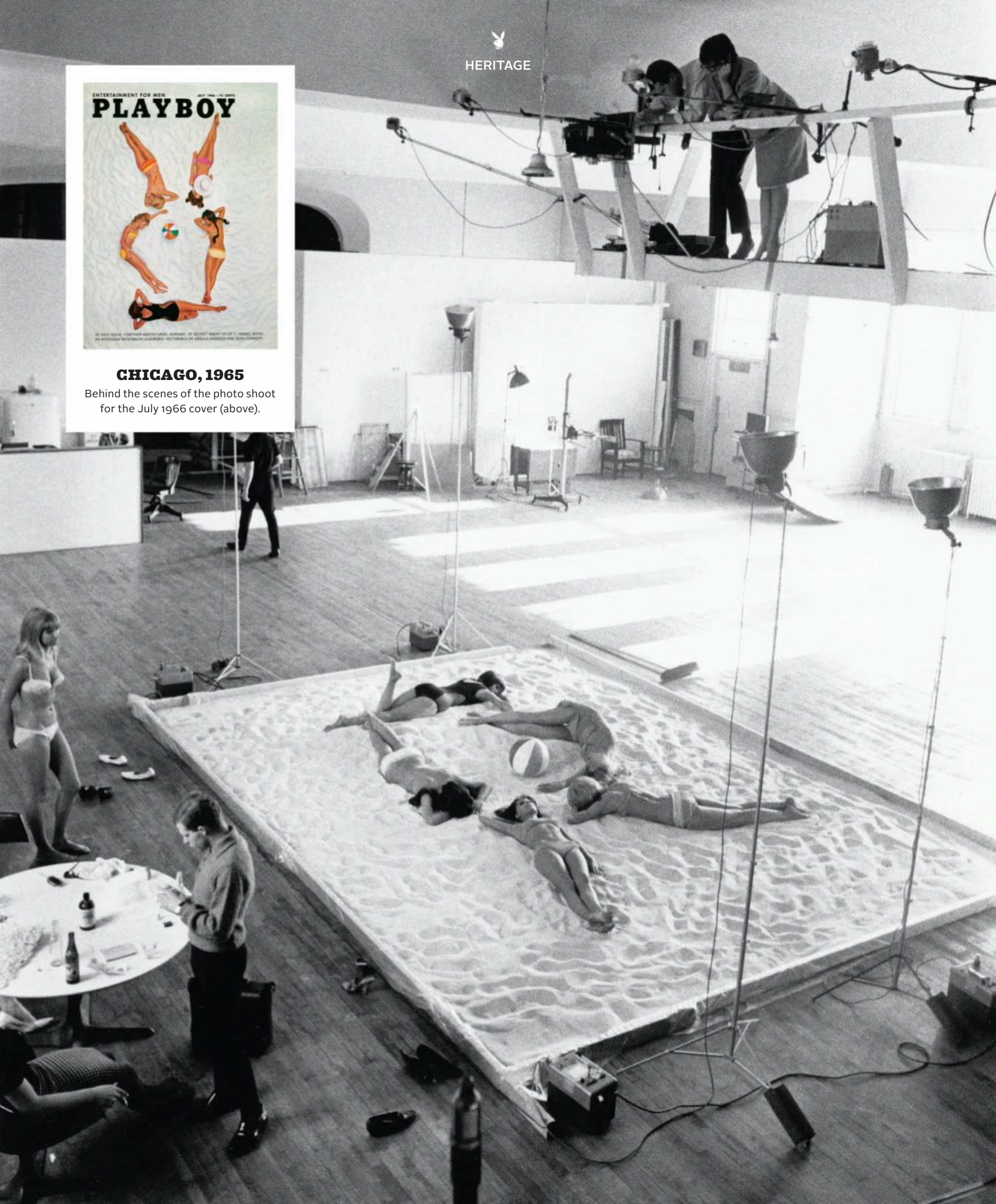


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CHICAGO, 1965

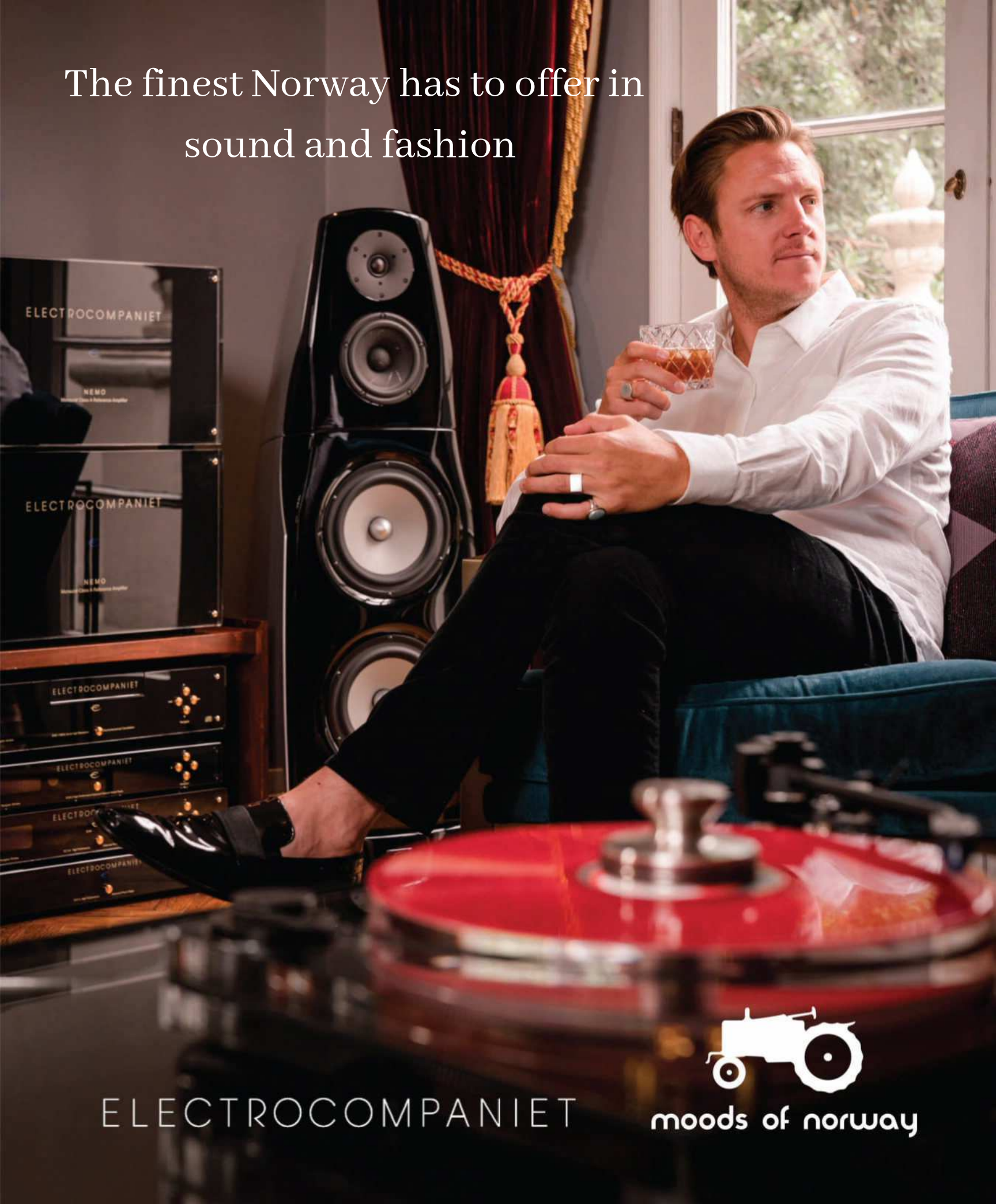
Behind the scenes of the photo shoot for the July 1966 cover (above).





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